

**The Ramakrishna Mission
Institute of Culture Library**

Presented by

Dr. Baridbaran Mukerji

RMICL-8

7 199

7199

THE LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

BY

A. VAN DE PERRE

DOKTER IN DE GENEESKUNDE
VOLKSVERTEGENWOORDIGER VOOR ANTWERPEN

WITH A MAP AND DIAGRAMS



LONDON
GRANT RICHARDS LTD.
ST MARTIN'S STREET
MDCCCXIX

RMIC LIBRARY	
Acc No	7199
	409.193
	PIR
	✓
	JAY
	✓

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY THE RIVERSIDE PRESS LIMITED
EDINBURGH

**DEDICATED TO
THE FLEMINGS
WHO GLORIOUSLY FELL
IN BATTLE**

"The one thing to be done is to lead and help our people to know better the facts of the European situation as it stands to-day, including the wishes and aspirations of the various nationalities and the conditions upon which any durable peace must be based."

LORD BRYCE.

This book took birth at the darkest hour of a time of suffering, in the need which the author felt of acquainting the English people (for centuries the natural protectors of Belgium, who in this war have given proof of an unequalled devotion) with the condition of the Flemish people.

The author regrets that it has not been given him to throw a vivid light on those splendid times when the radius of Flemish culture shone upon the world. He has not set out to write the history of Flemish civilisation, but merely to show the present-day position of the Flemings from a political point of view.

The haste with which, and the circumstances in which, the author—far from his country, and insufficiently documented—has had to complete his task might be offered as excuse for more than one imperfection.

Moreover, to many a reader it may perhaps seem that certain arguments have been pushed to their extreme limits. Let it be taken into consideration, however, that the opponents of the Flemings exploit with untiring cunning the least argument which may help them in their fight against the right of the Flemish folk to a higher culture.

The author owes a special word of thanks to the learned Mr Ferdinand Maertens, general director at the Ministry of Agriculture and Public Works, who so readily and so kindly undertook the execution of the map.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	11
HAS FLANDERS BEEN BILINGUAL ?	81
CHAPTER	
I. THE MIDDLE AGES	33
II. UNDER THE BURGUNDIANS	60
III. CEDED BY THE HABSBURGS TO SPAIN	88
IV. FROM AUSTRIA TO FRANCE AND HOLLAND	181
V. FLANDERS UNDER BELGIUM	145
VI. THE FLEMISH DEFENCE	175
VII. THE CONSEQUENCES OF BILINGUALISM	192
VIII. IS FLANDERS BILINGUAL ?	221
IX. WILL FLANDERS BECOME BILINGUAL ?	250
X. TOWARDS THE SOLUTION	257
DIAGRAMS	281

INTRODUCTION

1. LANGUAGES IN BELGIUM

IN the northern half of Belgium—the provinces of West Vlaanderen, Oost Vlaanderen, Antwerpen, Limburg, and more than two-thirds of Brabant (the *arrondissements* of Brussel and Leuven)—Flemish, a Germanic (Low German) idiom, is spoken. Literary Flemish is identical with the Dutch language spoken in Holland and South Africa.

In the southern half—the provinces of Liège, Luxemburg, Namur, Hainaut and Brabant (the *arrondissement* of Nivelles)—Walloon, a Romantic idiom is spoken.

It follows from the fact that two languages are spoken in Belgium that the history of each of them necessarily begins with the demarcation of the language frontier. It is still a matter of debate whether or no the ancient Belgians were of Germanic or Celtic race. By historians who incline to the latter view it is held that the original Belgians were first Romanised in Cæsar's time. The population dwelling south of the language frontier maintained a permanent character, and from those

Gallo-Romans the Walloons are descended. The population dwelling north of the language frontier were entirely Germanised through the invasion of the Franks in the fourth and fifth centuries, and from these Germanic Franks the Flemings are descended.

Those who maintain that the ancient Belgians were Germanic from the third century B.C. hold that these populations conquered the Celts, who were a second time vanquished by the Romans. In the north the Celtic element vanished, but it gradually increased toward the south. Finally, the Franks set the Germanic seal on the people to the north of the Silva Carbonaria, which became the barrier between the two races. The forest is to-day, as it was thirteen centuries ago, the boundary between Flemings and Walloons. It has undergone but very slight changes, and from that far-off time "dates the duality of Belgium."¹ It is absolutely necessary from the outset to insist on this duality, the more so as personages of the highest authority know nothing of it—or ignore it. Thus M. Louis Léger, member of the Institute, professor at the College de France, writes of "the Latin group constituted by Belgium."²

¹ L. Van der Essen. *A Short History of Belgium*. University of Chicago Press.

² L. Léger. *Le Panславisme et l'Intérêt Français*. Flemmarion. Paris. 1918.

Which of the theories mentioned above is the right one may be left to the historians for discussion. We are satisfied with the fact that both opinions lead to one and the same conclusion—namely, that the Belgians living to-day to the north of the language frontier are of Germanic descent, and that from the fifth century dates the duality of Belgium.

Consequently Belgium started in 1830 with a bilingual people, or, rather, with two peoples dwelling side by side and each of them speaking its own language. This may be an important cultural factor, as it forms a link between Germanic and Romantic civilisation.

This bilingualism has been nevertheless a cause of great internal troubles, which became known abroad, during the war, through the concerted action of a few Flemings, who sided with the German invader, with a view to founding an autonomous Flanders.

These internal difficulties do not arise from the fact that Belgium is inhabited by two language communities—strife between the two elements is unknown—but because the edifice of the state is wrongly planned. Unsound internal political conditions exist, the consequence of a narrow-minded, even odious policy, which has not taken into account the bilingual condition of the country, but has

striven to make the people accept preconceived principles of state, quite out of touch with reality. Starting with the dogma that in one state there should live one people, speaking one tongue, everything was done during the first years of Belgium's independence to achieve that end. The Administration, the Army, Justice, Education, everything connected with the state was French. As a result, the Flemish folk had no rights, they had only to learn French! This systematic spreading of French influences produced an ever-growing opposition. The "Flemish Movement" began, and the state had to make concessions.

But here again statesmen started from a false principle—viz. that not only Belgium, but also Flanders, was by itself bilingual. On this assumption they framed their policy, which could never satisfy the Flemings, for it would have ended, as it was meant to end, in making Flanders more French than before. The discontent of the Flemings had reached a climax just before the war.

Germany exploited these difficulties during the war in order to further the disruption of Belgium. Thus internal difficulties became an external danger.

It was entrusted to a few distinguished Belgians to answer the German allegation

that Belgium was no nation. They thought it their duty to follow the Germans on the question of bilingualism. No one may doubt their good intentions, they acted for the welfare of the Fatherland, and, remembering that, their answer must find its explanation.

Nevertheless we may ask ourselves if it is advisable to follow the Germans on the strategically weak point of bilingualism instead of making a frontal attack. "It is no use mincing words as to the facts."¹

Let us boldly declare to the Germans that Flemings live in the north of Belgium and speak Netherlandish, and Walloons live in the south and speak French. Both have to decide their own fate. Germany has no right to interfere. They have given proof that they want to stay under one roof.

Whatever happens, one thing is certain—viz. that, after the war, internal peace can only be possible in Belgium if the State accommodates itself to the bilingualism of the country. To bring about this accommodation we must study the conditions to which the state will have to conform. And there is a danger that no agreement may be reached.

The Flemings want a Flemish Flanders.

The politicians want a bilingual Flanders.

¹ Lloyd George on the Irish Question, 8th March 1917.

On this point the battle will be waged. The standpoint of the Flemings is, roughly, as follows :—the Flemish people use but one language, like every other people in the world, for there is *no* bilingual people. The Flemings have a right to be governed in Netherlandish, judged in Netherlandish, drilled in Netherlandish, educated in Netherlandish. Bilingualism leads to backwardness, denial of one's own tongue and one's own culture. It is nothing more than deceit.

To prove that Walloons and Flemings will be equal "in right and in fact," the Walloons are compelled by law, against the wishes of the Flemings, to learn Netherlandish. It is evident that the Walloons will never learn Netherlandish and that this law will raise the anger of the Walloons against the Flemings, who did not demand this law : the final result will be the complete separation and estrangement of Wallonia and Flanders. It is quite as clear that the immense majority of the Flemish people, during the few years which the working-class child is able to devote to education, will never learn French. In the meantime the evil against which the Flemings have set themselves will continue.

To prevent this evil we are compelled to raise our voice and combat the not yet proved

assertion that Flanders has always been bilingual. Procrastination would only lead to a greater evil. "When long-established falsehoods have had habitual and undisturbed possession of the public mind, they form an atmosphere which we inhale long before consciousness begins. Hence the spurious colours with which we have thus been surreptitiously imbued long survive the power—or even the act—of recurrence to the original standards." ¹ We might add that when false conceptions have permeated the public they do not like to be disturbed in them. If those new-fangled conceptions should come to stay, it would be very difficult for the Flemings to eradicate them. The secret enemies of the Flemings count on this. No matter what may be argued, when it is too late the facts will be there. Therefore, *Principiis obsta!*

Let us put up a board and let the inscription warn the Flemings: "Mortal danger."

The standpoint of the politicians is the following:—

Flanders has always been bilingual; thus it has to remain so in Administration, in Justice, in Education, etc. To prove their allegation they fall back on history and the historians. Amongst the latter in the first rank are Pirenne and Kurth, two savants of distinction.

¹ Gladstone.

According to the politicians, French influence has acquired a historical right over Flanders. What is the value of such a historical argument? History may be a rich source of enlightenment. Because they neglected history, Belgian statesmen have pursued an unsound, anti-national, anti-social French policy, which has led to the dissensions we witness to-day. Consideration of the history of Flanders would have shown them that the Flemish people had been bowed for centuries under oppression, and that it has been waiting the opportunity of freedom. The Flemish folk is sturdy and strong; it will never die. It is not in the power of our legislative or administrative authorities, be they spiritual or temporal, to uproot our people, to make it French in character!

There is a Rumanian saying: "The Rumanian never dies." Nor does the Fleming! And the murderous onslaught of those statesmen who use this historical argument (even were it found to be backed by facts, which is not the case) in order to kill the Flemish people is an overt act against justice. "It is never permitted," said H.H. the Pope, on 22nd January, during the war—"it is never permitted for any reason whatsoever to violate justice."

To found a policy on a historical argument cannot be sound. The historical method is

insufficient to solve a problem of state. Rulers have to administer a country not with one eye on the past, but with both on the present; not for the dead, but for the living. It is of the utmost importance to know what Flanders is, what Wallonia is. The basis of our national policy is not alone rooted in the past; it is not what one might wish it to be; it has to be shaped according to present-day facts. The tendency to attach too much importance to the past may give proof of a reactionary mind. Why build on the past? The Flemings live for the future!

We do not need all those historical considerations, however interesting, in order to prove the vitality of Belgium as a nation, as the common appanage, as a common house sheltering Walloons and Flemings under one roof. For us it is sufficient to know that Flemings and Walloons desire to live together, if each has sufficient space for growth and development, and always providing that the state adapts itself to make "the house" "a home."

We Flemings are prepared to make the necessary concessions, in order to live in a brotherly fashion with the Walloons, and to do great things together, according to our own culture.

Rousseau once wrote, and justly, that "If the legislator, erring as to his object, establishes a principle different from that resulting from the nature of things, the state will not cease to be agitated till this principle is destroyed or changed, and invincible nature has re-established its sway."¹

He who would build on another's foundation builds on quicksands. His building is bound to crumble, and this collapse will have effected so much mischief that Belgium may be threatened with disaster. Nature has never yet been coerced by preconceived principles of state; Nature takes her revenge.

To those who would wish the position other than it is, Palmerston—who belonged to that school of statesmen who consider the interest of the state to be supreme, and whose words, therefore, have the more value—Palmerston said in 1813, concerning the emancipation of the Catholics (change the word "Catholics" to "Flemings" and the words apply perfectly to our present conditions): "The question is not whether we could have so large a part of the population Catholic or not. There they are, and we must deal with them as we can. It is vain to think that by any human pressure we can stop the spring which gushes from the

¹ J. J. Rousseau. *Du Contrat Social*.

earth. But it is for us to consider whether we will force it to spend its strength in secret and hidden course, undermining our fences and corrupting our soil, or whether we shall at once turn the current into the open and spacious channel of honourable and constitutional ambition, converting it into the means of national prosperity and public wealth.”¹

To fight the Flemish nature would be just as difficult and as dangerous to our country as Palmerston believed would be the opposition to the Catholics.

2. BILINGUALISM

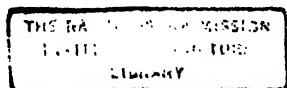
Before dealing with this subject we have to examine the three following preliminary questions:—

- (1) What is bilingualism ?
- (2) Have historians treated the question without prejudice ?
- (3) Have politicians not altered the purport of what historians have said ?

(1) *What is Bilingualism ?*

To prevent later misconceptions we shall first of all establish that the term bilingualism may be taken in four different senses :

¹ H. Lytton Bulwer. *Palmerston*. Bentley. London. 1870.



(1) A country may be bilingual when the majority of both groups of the population is acquainted with two idioms. This is not the case in Belgium, and the condition will, in fact, be found nowhere, being no more than a hypothesis.

(2) A country may be bilingual when the whole of the population belonging to two different groups has become fused, while each group goes on using its own language. This is certainly not the case in Belgium.

(3) A country may be bilingual when one half of its population, separated from the rest by a linguistic boundary, speaks one language, while the second half, or a considerable part of it, knows two languages. This hypothesis is the one dear to Frenchifying politicians.

(4) A country may be bilingual when there live in it two groups of people separated by a linguistic boundary and speaking each its own language. This is undoubtedly the case in Belgium.

And here comes in a question of conception and proportion. What must be the proportion of people knowing both languages to the total number of persons belonging to each individual group before that group may be called bilingual ?

Another question is whether the autoch-

thonous population alone should be taken into account, or whether there should be reckoned with it the allogeous population—that is, the foreign immigrants. This question is of the utmost importance, and has led to endless discussions in the case of Alsace-Lorraine.

The following questions will show us even more clearly the intricacy of the problem :—

(1) *May a people be considered bilingual because during a given period of its history foreigners have lived in its towns and spoken a language other than that of the autochthonous population?*

If so, we shall have to admit readily that Flanders has been bilingual, or rather polyglot. It is safe to assume that the bankers—the Medici, the Portinari, the Guidetti — spoke Italian at Brugge (Bruges) in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; that, in like manner, the Spaniards spoke Spanish, the German Hanse merchants German, and the English French or English.

When Antwerpen knew the full tide of prosperity in the sixteenth century it sheltered representatives of all great European cities and all languages were spoken within its walls.

In 1912 there were in Belgium 57,010 persons of German nationality; 20,638 of them lived

in the province of Liège, 16,961 in the province of Brabant, 10,770 in the province of Antwerpen. Ought these provinces therefore to be considered bilingual?

According to the *Neueste Nachrichten* of Munchen, there were 100,000 Germans earning an honest living in France in 1857, 80,000 of them in Paris alone.¹ In 1906 there were in France 222,162 naturalised persons.² London might also be called bilingual or polyglot, seeing that before the war it sheltered 27,815 male Germans! No fewer than 58 German firms were registered on the Stock Exchange, without mentioning 169 naturalised Germans! Besides these, London held, and holds, hundreds of thousands of foreigners. Candidates for Parliament at election time often find it necessary to address the electors in a language other than English. In a word, the whole world might thus be said to be bilingual.

(2) *May a people be declared bilingual when a foreign power occupies its territory and exercises civil and military domination?*

If so, England was bilingual throughout the Middle Ages. William the Conqueror introduced the French tongue in 1066. Edward III.

¹ *La Neutralité Belge et les Crises Européennes*. Dentu. Paris. 1859.

² J. Bertillon. *La Dépopulation de la France*. Bibl. des Sciences Morales. 1911.

opened Parliament with an English address for the first time. Moreover, all nations which have had to suffer foreign domination have been bilingual, Flanders included. Under the Burgundians, *e.g.*, all posts of consequence were given to French-speaking people. The historian L. Van der Essen writes: "Only the Burgundian and Picardian nobles, however, were to be found at Court, occupying the public offices, and entirely submissive to their sovereign."

Then Belgium, too, will be polyglot after the war, for during the occupation many offices have been held by Germans. In like manner, Poland, Alsace-Lorraine.

(3) *If, in addition to foreigners, a few nobles and rich people speak the language of the intruder, may the nation be considered bilingual?*

This theory once accepted, then every nation is bilingual that has lived for some time under foreign rule.

(4) *Is a people bilingual when a small minority once knew, or still knows, two or more languages?*

If so, in what relation must this minority stand to the rest?

Shall we say that Holland is bilingual or multi-lingual, seeing that a relatively great number of its inhabitants know two or more languages? Or may we maintain that the

province of Liège is bilingual, seeing that out of a total of 856,372 inhabitants 50,068 are declared as speaking French and Netherlandish, 28,627 French and German, 474 Netherlandish and German, and 4229 the three languages—altogether 83,398 polyglots ?

Or is the province of Hainaut any less so where out of 1,184,668 inhabitants 49,579 are said to speak French and Netherlandish, 2560 French and German, 50 Netherlandish and German, 1028 the three languages—in all, 53,213 multi-linguals ?

In that sense the whole of Europe would be bilingual. When Latin was abandoned as the language of general culture, French exercised world-wide influence. But with the growth of nationality and with democracy in the ascendant, the vernacular got the upper hand and everywhere French lost its influence—in Germany, Holland, etc.

(5) *Is a people bilingual where a small number of persons speak and know, exclusively, a language different from that of the great majority of the population ?*

Is the province of Liège bilingual because 9744 people speak German exclusively ? Or Luxemburg, where 11,487 people speak German only ?

It would be of considerable interest to have a decisive answer to those questions before

resuming our argument. However, we cannot wait for an answer. Yet all further discussion becomes difficult if we do not formulate beforehand some fixed opinions in the matter. We think that where the above-mentioned circumstances exist a people is *not* to be considered bilingual. We are strongly conscious that in this we have public opinion on our side. Small minorities must give way to the majority.

M. Destrée, who belongs to the opposite camp in Belgian politics, absolutely agrees with us on that point.¹ Besides, whoever does not agree must draw the logical conclusion—viz. that where the aforementioned circumstances prevail, as in the provinces of Liège and Hainaut, as in Holland and so on, the law courts, public administration, etc., must be organised on the principle of bilingualism.

It would be quite a different thing if, for whatsoever cause, a very considerable minority existed—not only in times gone by, but also in our own days—unable to understand the language of the country. In such a case the minority possesses certain rights and the state must adapt its policy accordingly. But it has never been in the interest of a state to call to life such minorities, to encourage them and to perpetuate them. On the contrary, it is to

¹ "Le Principe des Nationalités." *Grande Revue*. May, 1916.

the state's advantage to see that all abnormal developments disappear, and this the "more especially when difference of language widens the distance already separating the rich from the poor.

(2) *Impartiality of the Historians*

When eminent historians affirm that Flanders is bilingual, we have to examine the meaning they attach to the word and whether they have written without prejudice. We ought also to inquire into the facts upon which they found their assertion. It would not befit the dignity of our cause to reject without serious investigation the facts adduced in evidence. That is a task which we leave to responsible scholars. The scholars, however, do not only adduce facts, but also draw conclusions from them. And in this regard it may not be pretended that none but historians are qualified to judge. It is the duty of others to see whether the historians have acted as impartial judges, letting the facts bear witness to what they say, neither more nor less, or whether they have not rather listened to the advice of Fustel de Coulanges, "Il faut savoir solliciter un texte," and consequently if their narrative has retained that "charm of impartiality which is the chastity of history."

Again, we may allege facts which contradict the thesis of these historians in order that from the conflict of ideas new light may spring.

(3) *Politicians and Historians*

Last of all we must inquire if the politicians have not altered the purport of what the historians have said.

Let us recapitulate.

The problem is so comprehensive that it is almost impossible to take a general view of it without writing a complete history of Belgium. This for two important reasons :

First, because the influence of France and of the French tongue has had, in the course of the centuries, periods of increase and decrease ; and second, because the Flemish provinces have felt that influence one more than another. Consequently we are compelled to examine the conditions prevalent during different epochs in our history, in different provinces. We shall therefore investigate the circumstances during the Middle Ages ; during the Burgundian period, under the Habsburg dynasty ; under Austrian domination ; under French rule ; during the union with Holland and in Belgium.

HAS FLANDERS BEEN BILINGUAL ?

“Vast bodies of people, with brains and money at their disposal, have been interested in obscuring the truth, and have used every instrument in their power to do so.”

ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE.

CHAPTER I

THE MIDDLE AGES

(a) *Flanders*

AFTER the death of Charlemagne Belgium, by the Treaty of Verdun in 843, was divided into two parts by the River Schelde. The western part, Flanders, came politically under French domination, the eastern part under German. That political dependence, however, does not answer our modern conception of the word. Flanders was a county; the province of Brabant, as we know it to-day, together with the province of Antwerpen constituted the duchy of Brabant; the province of Liège was then a prince-bishopric, and the province of Limburg a county. Towns sprang up and especially in Flanders attained a high degree of economic development. Together with the increasing wealth developed a spirit of independence. A double struggle arose. The towns claimed participation in the government. The count or duke was obliged to yield to their demands and granted them rights and liberties, recorded in their "Keure." On the other hand, the dukes and counts, basing themselves on

34 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

the towns, strove to make themselves more and more independent on the one hand of the King of France, on the other of the Emperor of Germany. The struggle was very uneven. One day fortune favoured the count or duke, another the emperor or the king; but, after all, dependence remained a fact for some six centuries. The Flemish people, consequently, was not free and felt the moulding spirit of the dominating power. Thus is explained the French influence in Flanders, all the greater because the counts who ruled in Flanders were often of French origin, whereas the dukes of Brabant were truly national. Further, Flanders consisted of two parts: Walloon Flanders and Flemish Flanders. A similar division existed in Brabant. But there the Walloon district was very small compared with the rest of the duchy, whereas in Flanders the Walloon part south of the linguistic boundary bulked more largely in relation to the whole of the county. We need not therefore be astonished to see the French tongue used more widely in Flanders than in Brabant. Both were bilingual in so far as both were inhabited to the north of the linguistic boundary by a Netherlands-speaking population and to the south by Walloons. We say "Walloons" and not "French," for the people of these parts

spoke not pure French but a Romantic dialect, as it does to-day. Besides, it was at a later date that a literary, general French language came into existence.

It is indeed in this sense that bilingualism is understood by that eminent historian, Pirenne.

“ Even in our own days in modern Belgium, after more than 1400 years, the primitive situation has not changed : Flemings and Walloons still occupy, in relation to each other, almost the identical positions taken up by their forefathers about the middle of the fifth century.” ¹

Professor Pirenne speaks even more clearly in another place : “ Extending from the Schelde to the Canche was included, exactly like the modern Belgium, a Flemish-speaking population in the north, and a population of Latin speech in the south.” ²

That is clear enough : in the north people use Netherlandish, in the south a French dialect. The author does not say that the country north of the linguistic boundary was bilingual. On the contrary, Flanders was bilingual only in the sense that it was peopled by two races separated

¹ Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. i., p. 16. Lamentin. Brussel. 1909.

² H. Pirenne. *Belgian Democracy*, p. 65. Manchester University Press. 1915.

36 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

by a linguistic boundary definitely mentioned by Professor Pirenne as follows :—

“ It was not till after the conquests first of Philip Augustus, who took away Artois from Flanders, and then of Philip the Fair, who took possession of the lordships of Lille, Douai and Orchies, that its population became exclusively Low Dutch in race. . . . Municipal constitutions showed the same characteristics to the north of the linguistic frontier as to the south.”¹

Two races there were. One of them falls out, and only the Flemish, the Germanic, remains. We are already in 1320 and as yet no sign of bilingualism appears in Flemish Flanders.

But how to reconcile the foregoing with this statement of the learned Professor in his *Histoire de Belgique* :

“ As early as the end of the twelfth century a knowledge of French seems to have been the indispensable part of any good education for the clergy, the higher and lower nobility. Certainly towards the close of the twelfth century a fair percentage of the aristocracy was bilingual. Very early a real growth of the French language took place, with the result that

¹ H. Pirenne. *Belgian Democracy*, p. 65. Manchester University Press, 1915.

French for the upper classes became a second national speech. It does not seem doubtful that as early as the thirteenth century Flanders presented, as regards the use of languages, a situation quite similar to what we observe to-day. Although French was very much in use in the monasteries, it was undoubtedly even more common among the aristocracy. French did not remain the monopoly of the nobility but even filtered down to a considerable part of the bourgeoisie."

The thesis is that part of the population speaks two idioms: churchmen, aristocrats and the higher bourgeoisie. What proof does Professor Pirenne produce?

To prove that churchmen knew French he writes: "Ever since the times of Charlemagne one meets in the Church and among the upper classes of society with a great number of people to whom the Romantic and Germanic dialects are equally familiar. In the monasteries Flemish and Walloon monks live side by side. . . . There was a tendency in the monasteries to choose bilingual abbots. Thierry of St Trond, *e.g.*, was considered by the monks of St Peter's at Gent worthy to bear the crosier because he spoke both Flemish (Thiois) and Walloon (Roman); another monk of Sint Truiden (St Trond), Rodolph, a native of

38 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

Hainaut, was obliged to learn Flemish to make himself understood by his pupils.”¹

Such an argument utterly fails to convince us that the clergy spoke two languages. It is highly probable that they used Latin as their ordinary tongue. It is quite natural that a bishop should know both idioms as he had to deal with Walloons and Flemings at the same time. The fact that Thierry was chosen because he spoke both tongues is the best proof that the other priests did not know them.

With regard to the aristocracy, Professor Pirenne surmises that it was bilingual! He writes :

“It was the same with the lay aristocracy as with the clergy. If all the dioceses of the Southern Netherlands were bilingual, Flanders, Brabant and Limburg were so too; and we may say that the counts and barons saw themselves compelled like the bishops to speak two languages. Already during the twelfth century knowledge of French seems to have been the indispensable complement of all good education. Flemish children were sent to learn it in the monasteries of the diocese of Laon. It spread of necessity also among the lesser nobility on account of the frequent meetings brought about by tournaments between the

¹ Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. i., p. 153.

knights of Flanders and Brabant and those of Hainaut, Artois and Picardy.

“It is certain that at the end of the eleventh century a fair-sized section of the aristocracy of Flanders and Lotharingia was bilingual, and this circumstance fitted it admirably to take a leading part in the international adventure, the Crusades. They alone could give to that cosmopolitan army which was to conquer the Holy Sepulchre the chief it needed. Godfrey de Bouillon, says a German chronicler, was put at the head of the crusaders, because, having been educated on the boundary line of the Romantic and Germanic peoples, he knew both their languages equally well.”¹

Let the reader note how cautious Professor Pirenne is in his assertions: “one cannot doubt,” “it must necessarily spread,” followed by the affirmation, “to be sure . . .”

What does it all mean? Godfrey of Bouillon was placed at the head of the army because he knew both languages. If that be so, then the number of bilinguals must have been very small indeed!

We shall therefore wait for more serious proofs before we agree with Professor Pirenne: “French has become in Flanders a second national language for the higher clergy and the

¹ Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. i., p. 153.

40 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

aristocracy," but we agree entirely with him when he goes on : "but it had no influence whatever on the speech of the people. That remained purely Germanic." ¹

We feel thankful for this avowal. Now we know in what sense Mr Pirenne uses "national tongue." A language becomes national as soon as it is spoken by the higher clergy and the aristocracy !

If our present-day politicians desire to base their policy on the fact that some influence was exercised by France during the Middle Ages, then they must found a different sort of policy on other facts which we observe on the other side of the Schelde :

"German influence in the Low Countries finds its peculiar expression in the literary monuments. From the reign of Otto I. the Imperial Church is eminently the means and the instrument of the intellectual culture of the clergy of Lotharingia. From the tenth to the twelfth century this country is subject not less to the literary than to the political hegemony of Germany. Just as the German bishops governed and ruled the country, so they also organised instruction and furthered study." ²

¹ Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. i., p. 155.

² *Ibid.*

Having established this, Professor Pirenne concludes in a general way : " The intellectual influence of France on the Low Countries was still greater than its political influence. In the Germanic parts as well as in the Romantic it introduced its art and literature, just as in the eleventh century it had introduced the reformation of Cluny and Chivalry. Its '*chansons de geste*,' its '*fabliaux*,' its poetry were imitated or translated."

For whose use, we may rightly ask, were these Netherlandish translations intended ? For the lower classes ? But did these read at all ? For the upper classes ? But has it not just been pretended that they all knew French ?

The University becomes the general rendez-vous of Walloon and Flemish students.

Were not lessons given in Latin ? But let that pass. Since Flanders was dependent on France, it is quite safe to assume, *a priori*, that part of the population will have learned French, the more so if it be true that in public affairs Latin, which had been the official language, was done away with and French was used in its stead.

" Down to about the year 1250 French was the only vulgar tongue used for all public services, as well in the Walloon as in the Flemish districts of the country."

42 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

This may or may not be true, but we deny to Belgian statesmen the right to draw therefrom conclusions which may influence our present organisation. Flanders was not free, and things were done without its consent. Is French England's language because it was such at that time ?

It is of greater consequence to know if the Flemings resisted these Frenchifying tendencies. Pirenne readily grants this point :

(1) " The existence in the same country of two languages, each spoken by the different portion of the population, could not but give rise to rather serious difficulties. In 1175 Pope Alexander III. confirms the ancient custom of the burghers of Gent to plead, in matters ecclesiastical, before their own deans, and dispenses them from appearing before the official tribunal of Tournai, where a foreign language is used.

(2) " At the end of the thirteenth century, ' one reads,' among the reasons given by the Flemings for obtaining from Boniface VIII. the creation of a separate diocese, that the greater part of the county uses a Germanic idiom and cannot profit by the teaching of its bishops, who do not know its language.¹

" From the middle of the thirteenth century,

¹ Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. i., p. 336.

when Flemish prose had obtained a sufficient degree of development to be used for the execution of deeds, the administrative bodies in immediate relation with the public adopted it without any opposition from the count. Yet French remained the language almost exclusively used by the central administration until the reign of Louis of Male. The prince's officials retained the language of the prince so far that even to the older men, who discontinued its regular use, knowledge of it was still indispensable. To get an exact and clear view of the linguistic situation in Flanders down to the reign of Guy of Dampierre, it is sufficient to look through any script or register of the time. One meets with Latin, French and Flemish texts pell-mell. And just as to-day the knowledge of these three languages is the first unavoidable qualification for the historian of Flanders, so it was six centuries ago for all officials and all public clerks.¹

“French did not spread in Flanders among the deep strata of the population. The masses in the towns, like the inhabitants of the country, remained purely Flemish in language. At Yper, for instance, the deeds from the archives show us how, in the fourteenth century, during the period when they seized municipal power, they

¹ Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. i., p. 333.

44 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

substituted Flemish for French for everyday administration. All things considered, French in Flanders during the thirteenth century was the language of the court, the nobility and of business.”¹

Professor Kurth quotes another proof of the opposition raised by the Flemings : “ Philip the Fair arrogated to himself the right of controlling the administration of the count’s justice towards the burghers and inhabitants of Gent. He enacted, therefore, that his Provost of St Quentin should be present, in person or by delegate, at the audiences of the count and his justices, as often as the burghers required him ; and in order that he might understand the procedure, it was to be in French.”²

From this fact Professor Kurth concludes rather rashly :

“ This ordinance suffices to show how widely French had spread in the country. It is evident, indeed, that the King of France would not have made such a demand if French had not been widespread enough at Gent to make one suppose that it was known by the whole

¹ Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. i., p. 336.

² Warnkoenig. *Histoire de Flandre*, vol. iii., pp. 169 and fgg. Quoted by Professor Kurth in *La Frontière Linguistique en Belgique*, vol. ii., pp. 28 and fgg. Société Belge de Librairie. Bruxelles. 1898.

of the well-to-do bourgeoisie, from whom the aldermen were chosen."

But if this be sound reasoning, we might to-day draw the conclusion (quite opposed to truth) that the bourgeoisie and the aldermen of the Flemish communes of the northern part of Hainaut know French. Are not their official documents returned by the provincial authorities when written in Netherlandish ?

Professor Kurth goes on to say :

"Moreover, the regulation was repealed soon after, for in the same year, 1289, on the report of J. de Meyere, the Parliament of Paris formally recognised that the aldermen of Gent did not understand French, and also that they resisted the introduction of the French tongue."

The danger was, as we have seen, very great. The astonishing fact is not that French penetrated the upper classes, but that our people preserved both nationality and language. Though subject to a French king, ruled by a French count, and dependent upon French nobles and governors, still the people were in all things Flemish. It cannot be gainsaid that such an administration must adopt either systematically or unconsciously French tendencies. "French still finds in the administration a powerful instrument of diffusion. . . ." ¹

¹ Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. i., p. 334.

46 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

“Up to the end of the thirteenth century the Netherlands appear to be no more than an addition to the Capet monarchy!” It was the consequence of the battle of Bouvines. French influence was inevitably the source of serious trouble. Between the upper classes with their French habits and the Flemish people there was a cleavage that could not long continue.

“By their habits, by their manners, often even by the language they speak, the patricians are isolated from the common people—the workers. . . . Between the plutocratic class and the rest of the population of the town the contrast is striking.¹ . . . The bourgeois made common cause with the people.”²

More than once the Count of Flanders sided with the Flemish folk. And when war broke out between Flanders and France the nobles of Flanders forsook their own countrymen in the midst of the struggle. But the Flemings did not lose heart. The hatred which the patriciate had won for itself was henceforth increased by an equal hatred for France, its champion. Accordingly the popular party gave the patricians their nickname of “Leliacrts” (men of the lilies), which they

¹ Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. i., p. 371.

² *Ibid.*, p. 383.

never were to lose. French influence, which till then had so deeply penetrated Flemish civilisation, found itself face to face with the hostility of the populace. Owing to the strife that broke out between the rich and the poor within the walls, the artisans quickly developed a kind of national sentiment. The commons took for their standard the banner of the count. The "Clauwaerts" (men of the claw—because of the claws of the Flemish lion) confronted the "Leliaerts"¹ and gave battle in the marshes of Groeninghe, near Kortrijk (Courtrai).

The Flemings gained the day over the French army on the 11th July 1302, a victory that decided the fate of Flanders for ever.

"Moreover, it was Flanders which decided, in the fourteenth century, the destiny of the Low Countries. By its obstinate resistance to France, it saved them from the fate which seemed to be overtaking them at the end of the thirteenth century.

"Philip the Fair was the last King of France before Louis XI. who seriously threatened the frontier of Belgium : with him disappeared that predominance which, to the exclusion of others, France had exercised over our land since the battle of Bouvines,² July 27th, 1214."

¹ H. Pirenne. *Belgian Democracy*, p. 145.

² H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol i., p. 365.

48 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

“Flanders did not succeed in preserving her independence without receiving cruel wounds. Under Philip Augustus she lost Artois, and Walloon Flanders fell from her under Philip the Fair. Lille and Douai were no more part of that fellowship of great towns which for so long had given its character to the lands, and the country ceased to be a bilingual country.”¹

“From the battle of Kortrijk [Courtrai] dates the birth of the Flemish national conscience.”²

“A new and this time a definite peace was concluded in 1320. The territories provisionally ceded to France at Athis were yielded to France for ever. Flanders, till then bilingual, sacrificed its French-speaking populations and became purely Low Dutch in its language.”³

“First of all cut off from Artois (1191-1212), and then severed from Lille, from Douai, from Orchies, Flanders is now exclusively Germanic. It is much more than a river that cuts her off from France. It is, above all (as Villain already understood), a contrast of tongue and manners. The long war she had just come through had awakened in her the sentiment of nationality. Bilingual, Flanders had formerly and naturally

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. i., p. 366.

² *Ibid.*, p. 384.

³ H. Pirenne. *Belgian Democracy*, p. 150.

been kin with France; now become purely Flemish, she feels stirring within her the conscience of her own nature, and from this moment, resisting more strongly than ever the process of absorption, she rises up like a solid bastion on the most threatened side of the Netherlands.”¹

“Gone is the time when the kings of France treated the Belgian princes as clients and as protégés. They no longer give them orders; they seek to conciliate them by marriages and favours of all kinds.”²

“The political life of the Low Countries took on a more distinctly Germanic character, and French predominance declined in proportion. . . . Slowly there grew up on our soil an original civilisation which was to shed incomparable splendour on the fifteenth century.”³

The country ceased to be bilingual.

With this conclusion we might well end the chapter on the bilingualism of Flanders, at least until the French Revolution. Until then French influence will never again be so great as in the Middle Ages.

“From the beginning of the thirteenth century to the beginning of the fourteenth

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 4.

² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. i., p. 366.

50 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

France, freed from the rivalry of England and the Empire, ruled Europe. She enjoyed at once political and intellectual domination, and the Low Countries will be affected by it sooner and more thoroughly than any other country. French influence permeated them under St Louis and Philip the Fair much more deeply than it ever did in later years, if we except, in times much nearer to us, the reign of Napoleon I.”¹

And since—always according to Pirenne—it seems not to be doubted that, from the thirteenth century, Flanders presented in the use of languages a situation quite analogous to that which we observe nowadays,² we come to our conclusion :

Firstly : Professor Pirenne and Professor Kurth assert that Flanders was bilingual in the sense that Flanders was composed of two parts, the one to the north of the linguistic boundary, Flemish Flanders, the other to the south of it, Walloon Flanders.

Secondly : Neither Professor Pirenne nor Professor Kurth maintains that Flanders was bilingual in the sense that its population used two tongues.

Thirdly : Professor Pirenne and Professor

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. i., p. 235.

² *Ibid.*

Kurth pretend that the aristocracy and the higher clergy knew both Walloon and Flemish. But their proofs are so feeble that instead of strengthening they rather weaken the thesis; they contradict themselves more than once, hesitating here, asserting there. In the case of Professor Pircenne contradiction is particularly obvious between his *History* and his later work, *Les Anciennes Démocraties des Pays-Bas*, where he is much more reserved, the fruit (shall we say ?) of clearer insight.

Fourthly: Let it be granted that some members of the community spoke French out of habit; they always constituted a small minority only, and among them even a number of foreigners were to be found; it may even be probable that French was known by the lords of the land, who, attracted by wealth, visited Champagne and Picardy to joust with the knights there¹; let it be granted that Flemings and Walloons went as pilgrims to Tournai,² that in the south of Belgium, at St Amand, a monk wrote poetry in French and German,³ and that several abbots spoke both languages—how does that prove that the Flemish folk were bilingual ?

¹ L. Van der Essen. *A Short History of Belgium*. University of Chicago Press.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

52 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

Fifthly : A reaction was imminent ; the people were bound to be reflected in the destinies of the language which the people spoke exclusively.¹

Against the apparent proofs of Professor Pirenne witness the history of civilisation in Flanders, as it is seen in the literature of the Middle Ages.²

Firstly : We have no works extant written by the so-called French classes. The authors we know, Hendrik van Veldeke, Hadewijch, etc., wrote in Netherlandish. Hundreds of breviaries of the fourteenth century are Netherlandish. Jan van Boendale (1365), author of the *Brabantsche Ycesten*, van Maerlandt, Ruysbroeck (1381), Gerard de Groote (1384), all wrote in Netherlandish.

Secondly : The whole of our spiritual literature, epic, lyrical and didactic, is Netherlandish, whether written outside or inside the cloister.

Thirdly : Our didactic secular literature of the thirteenth century is Netherlandish. Yet it was written for the rich, as the people were illiterate. How many children went to school ? And what did they learn there ? " Reading, writing, a little arithmetic and bad Latin." ³ This, too, in the schools of " the great merchant cities." Why not French, if Flanders was bilingual ?

¹ Professor Kurth. *La Frontière Linguistique*, vol. ii., p. 36.

² P. Stracke, S.J. *Was Vlaanderen altijd tweetalig als nu ?*

³ H. Pirenne. *Belgian Democracy*, p. 122.

Fourthly : Our epic romances of chivalry were written to a large extent by minstrels. At the end of the thirteenth century Jan van Heelu immortalised, in Netherlandish, for the nobility of Brabant and its glorious duke, the heroic deeds accomplished at Woeringen in the midst of Flemish battle shouts.

(b) *Limburg, Liège and Brabant*

Limburg was, like Flanders, bilingual, in the sense that it was situated partly to the north and partly to the south of the linguistic boundary. It is divided into two nearly equal parts, the one Germanic, the other Romantic. Nowhere is there a question of a bilingual Flemish population. The prince-bishopric of Liège was bilingual in a similar sense. Out of twenty-three towns twelve were Flemish, against eleven Walloon.

The modern province of Brabant with the modern province of Antwerpen formed a duchy, situated, in parts, south of the linguistic boundary and containing, therefore, in addition a Walloon population. Brabant had a more independent existence than Flanders. Its dukes belonged to the county.

“The dukes of Brabant succeed one another, father and son, from Lambert of Louvain to John III., without interruption enjoying much popularity and authority. Their history cannot

54 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

be separated from the land over which they reigned. Brabanters by birth, customs¹ and interests they identified themselves completely with their subjects and, as early as the twelfth century, could call themselves 'protectors and defenders of the patria brabantensis.'"¹

The population of Brabant, therefore, had not to sustain the same struggle as Flanders. Yet the struggle in Flanders must have reacted on men's minds in Brabant. A few years after the Battle of the Golden Spurs, on 27th September 1312, Count John III. granted many privileges in the important Charter of Cortenberg; and, further, there was constituted a council of fourteen members, representing the nobility and the town, to whom was entrusted the task of seeing the Charter enforced; the members were to assemble every three weeks. A little later, on 12th July 1314, John III. granted two new "privileges," the Walloon and the Flemish charters, thus affirming the duality of Brabant.²

Moreover, in the Charter of Cortenberg enactments had already been made protecting the rights of the Netherlandish tongue. From the Chancellor the knowledge of three languages was required: Latin, French and Netherlandish. This was not done so that he might correspond

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 153.

² *Ibid.*, p. 156.

with the Flemish part of the country in French and *Netherlandish, but that he might negotiate in French with the Walloon country and in Netherlandish with the Flemish.

“The Provincial States and the Provincial Councils spoke the language of their country. In Brabant that language was Netherlandish, and the chancellor of Brabant used none other when he spoke to them in the name of the sovereign.”

“It was the same for the Council of Brabant, with this exception, however, that documents exclusively concerning the Romantic country were done in French.”¹ On what, then, does Professor Pirenne rely to maintain that French had got hold of the nobility?

“French penetrated Brabant in the same way as it did Flanders, but with less vigour. Like the counts, the dukes were surrounded by folk speaking the Romantic tongue and folk speaking the Germanic, for, like the counts also, they reigned over peoples in part Walloon, in part Flemish. By the thirteenth century French became the incontestably preferred language of the ducal house. True, its hold was not yet so absolute on this old national dynasty as on the foreign princes, who, from Thierry of Alsace, reigned on the other bank of the Schelde. The dukes used French for their correspondence and private business, but they

¹ Professor Kurth. *La Frontière Linguistique*, vol. ii., p. 57.

56 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

made no use of it in their dealings with their subjects. In the Germanic parts of Brabant the officials gave up the custom of writing documents in Latin only to use Netherlandish. But if the administration remained true to the national tongue, French won its way among the higher nobility, together with the *mœurs courtoises*.¹ But the use of French does not, for all that, seem to have become general in Brabant outside the higher nobility, and, even amongst those who prided themselves on knowing and speaking it, it did not succeed in throwing the national tongue completely into the background. The spread of French influences in this country seems to have been especially a matter of fashion, of good taste and of *bon ton*. The dukes themselves, if they no longer used the Netherlandish language for their domestic relations, necessarily had a full knowledge of it.”²

Thus, although we find some nobles who speak French, there is no question of a people speaking two languages. Professor Kurth, to be sure, does not even go so far as Professor Pirenne.

“As for the communes of Brabant, they will not be as enthusiastic for French as the Flemish towns; Brussel remains faithful to Latin and in

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. i., p. 337.

² *Ibid.*, p. 339.

the end consents to its abandonment, only to replace it at once with Netherlandish. Antwerpen, impenetrable to the French language, always remained the impregnable stronghold of the Flemish spirit: never once a public document was issued in French by its magistrates. Leuven (Louvain) was not less true to the national speech. Netherlandish was the language used in all civic deeds.”¹

It is noteworthy that at each occurrence of the “Joyous Entry” the count had to swear fidelity to the Charter—that is, to uphold the rights of Netherlandish. When, for example, the eldest daughter of the Duke John III. was married to a foreign prince, Wenceslas of Luxemburg, the towns took the necessary precautions, and on 3rd January 1356 he had to take the oath of loyalty to the Charter when making his “Joyous Entry.”² The Charter received additions and supplementary definitions.

On what does Professor Pirenne rely in asserting that “French gained the higher aristocracy”? This statement is the more unexplainable when one knows that the Land Charter of Cortenberg, made and ordered by Duke John the second of that name, in the presence of the nobles, is written in Netherlandish only.

¹ Professor Kurth. *La Frontière Linguistique.*

² Professor Kurth.

58 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

"All the lords were present and sealed these documents."¹ This point is the more important since the deed itself is of such moment. It was indeed "the chief pillar of the liberties of the two united duchies down to the tempestuous times of Philip II. of Spain."²

Let us finally cast a glance at our Netherlandish literature, for literature is at all times the truest mirror of society and its expression.

It has been proved, with an arsenal of facts, what a great number of nobles, in Flanders as in Brabant, practised Netherlandish poetry in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

"According to the calculations of Professor de Vreeze, there were about seven thousand middle-Netherlandish manuscripts still in existence, scattered throughout Europe. . . . Everyone knows that manuscripts were an article of luxury in the Middle Ages, only to be bought by the well-to-do. When one considers further that thousands of manuscripts were destroyed, that a large number of manuscripts bear the *ex libris* of noblemen, that the miniatures give proof very often that they were made for people of importance, we may reasonably conclude from the facts that the

¹ *Placaeten ende ordonnanties van de Hertoghen van Brabandi Princen van dese Nederlanden*. Antwerpen. By Hendrick Aetsens in de Commerstræt inde Lelie. 1648. Met gratie ende privilege door Antonius Anselmo.

² *The Cambridge Modern History*, vol. i., p. 419.

rich of those times read Netherlandish somewhat extensively.”¹

Was the Flemish land bilingual?

The influence of France had been great. The nobility and the higher clergy, even the higher nobility, knew (according to Professor Pirenne) two languages.

The people remained unilingual and reacted. By the end of the Middle Ages, before the rise of democracy, French influence declined. The language movement was born. From now onwards the people of Flemish Belgium spoke one language.

¹ Dr L. Willems. “Professor H. Pirenne over onze Middeleeuwen.” *Ons Vaderland*, 8th December 1917.

CHAPTER II

UNDER THE BURGUNDIANS

THE male descendants of the reigning houses in Flanders and of the national dynasties of the duchy of Brabant died out within a very short space of time. Consequently the county of Flanders and the duchy of Brabant, which up to that time had been separated by the Schelde, came each under the sway of a branch of the house of Burgundy, reigning over the French duchy of that name. Through heritage and marriage the Flemish country was destined, in accordance with the custom of the age, which made countries and nations pass from one reigning house to another, to be joined, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, with Burgundy, Luxemburg, Picardy, Artois, Holland and Gelderland, under one head, the house of Burgundy. Nevertheless the lands east of the Schelde remained during the Burgundian epoch a fief of the German Empire; those west of the Schelde—namely, Flanders—a fief of France. Both these powers made their domination felt from time to time. Try as they might, the Burgundians could not succeed in destroying this dependency; they

never reigned as kings over the Burgundian dominions. However, as far as splendour and power were concerned, the Burgundian dynasty was the most glorious in Europe. Moreover, it was closely related to the royal house of France and to the Habsburgs, who ruled the Empire.

Unhappily, the Burgundians were strangers in our country; they knew neither the customs nor the language nor the uses of the Flemish folk. That was an additional stumbling-block in the way of their task, already difficult enough. The particularist, the local—one might almost say the parochial—spirit was still very strong in the Flemish country. Not a town, large or small, but was very much engrossed with itself and its privileges. And in every town the different classes were more often than not hostile one to the other. There were only communal administrations. A general central government was still an unknown quantity.

The Burgundians set themselves, as an honourable task, the organisation of county and duchy, and the centralisation of government.

A first intimation of their intentions was the creation at Lille, in 1386, of a court named *Chambre de Conseil*, which was to control expenditure and officials. Though commendable enough in itself, this chamber was a blunder, owing to its constitution. Its members were strangers,

62 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

ignorant of the Netherlandish tongue, and its seat lay in an out-of-the-way place beyond the reach of the Flemish people. All business was conducted in French only.

Centralisation in itself already appeared hateful to the Flemings, who looked upon it as an instrument to curtail their freedom. The imposition of a foreign tongue stung national consciousness. The central authority joined issue with "the great communes, with whom it was engaged in perennial conflict."¹

Nevertheless, the dukes pursued their centralising policy. Following in the steps of his brother, the Duke Antony of Brabant founded at Vilvoorden a Chamber of Accounts and a Council of Justice (*Conseil de Justice*).

The seat of the council was better placed than at Lille; the language used was Netherlandish, and yet, as we shall see further on, the people opposed it and did not tolerate it until, as was only right, their direct representatives were permitted to join in the deliberations.

Opposition to centralisation made progress slow. The local administrations preserved their independent existence, and up to the reign of Charles the Bold the central government confined itself to what was strictly necessary. In 1467 Charles the Bold succeeded his father, Philip the Good.

¹ *The Cambridge Modern History*, vol. i., p. 418.

We shall see later on how, as a result of the opposition carried by the Flemings, the Council of Lille was divided into two parts, one of which, the Chamber of Accounts, remained at Lille, and the other, the Council of Justice, was transferred to Flanders, under the name of "Council of Flanders."

The country was governed in the first place by a Chancellor, who filled the rôle of Prime Minister, presided over the Duke's Council, was Chief Justice, and directed both home affairs and foreign policy. In no way was he in touch with the people.¹ He presided over the "Great Council" in the absence of the duke.

The Great Council, constituted originally in 1446, consisted of a number of members, who founded a permanent government. By the Decree of Thionville, in 1473,² the Council was divided into two parts: the first, preserving the title of "Great Council," was the "Council of State" of the duke; the other, called "Parliament," with its seat at Mechelen (Mechlin), became the tribunal of the whole of the Low Countries, a kind of Court of Appeal.

Further, Charles the Bold joined the Chambers of Accounts of Brussel and Lille into one Chamber of Accounts, sitting at Mechelen, and he founded

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 390.

² *Placaeten van Brabant*, x., p. 321.

64 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

a *Chambre du Trésor*, or Treasury Department, for the administration of his domains.

The whole of this organisation centred in the duke alone. It was his creation; consequently the members were appointed by him: the central government was an absolute monarchy.

That absolutist organisation persisted until the end of the eighteenth century—at least, in its distinctive features. The reader should always remember this when he wishes to judge correctly the history of the Flemish folk: The Flemish folk has never been at liberty to dispose of its own destinies. Its life has been one incessant, unrelenting struggle.

It has long been maintained successfully that the Burgundians began and carried through a systematic Frenchifying of Flanders—a thesis formally opposed by Professors Kurth and Pirenne. And, indeed, more than one proof may be adduced to show that several members of the Burgundian dynasty were not hostile to the Netherlandish tongue, unless the favourable disposition which they adopted on some occasions was mere diplomatic display.

Since 1830 the Belgian authorities have appeased the Flemings with sham concessions, being persuaded that the systematic Frenchifying of the central government is more than sufficient to counteract the effects of all petty concessions.

We are the more inclined to accept this hypothesis because centralisation, and consequently the growth of French influences, goes on gradually, and because many of the concessions made have only been granted under the pressure of the Flemish Movement.

Moreover, Professor Pirenne does not deny that French influences have steadily increased. The contradictions which are apparent in his utterances on the linguistic problem prove that he has not yet mastered his subject, or that his feelings have betrayed him. After having asserted so often that there was no systematic spread of French habits under the Burgundians he says :

“ Charles the Bold had put it [French] systematically in the place of Netherlandish in his relations with the Germanic provinces.”¹

How strong the Flemish Movement was the following attest :—

When the French soldiers invaded Flanders in 1384 the Flemings were forbidden to speak their language when in the vicinity of their count, Louis of Male.

At the same time the Flemings, who were at the battlefield of Roosebeke, said of the French king : “ We shall carry him to Gent and teach him Netherlandish.”

More significant still is the behaviour of the

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. iii., p. 10, note.

66 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

Flemish deputies towards Philippe le Hardi with regard to the Treaty of Tournai. Following the ancient custom, the treaty was drawn up in the language of the victor, this time in Netherlandish—and the duke received a French copy.¹

And yet Pirenne maintains that Louis of Male took Flemings into his service.

The Netherlandish language was given back its honour: "in all cases where it was the language used by him whom the deed concerned."

Of the 1382 deeds, contained in the cartulary of Louis of Male, 14 are in Latin, 498 in French and 870 in Netherlandish,² which was about the proportion of the Flemish population to the Walloon. Lille, Douai and Orchies had been added again to Flanders on 25th April 1369. Philippe le Hardi, who succeeded Louis of Male (30th January 1384), in order to make friends with the citizens of Gent enjoins the French Chancery to correspond with them in Netherlandish.³ The heir-presumptive was taught the Netherlandish tongue. Jean Sans Peur had a Flemish tutor, Master Baldwin de la Nieppe; and John himself saw to it that his successor was acquainted with the language. "Do we not know, moreover, that

¹ Professor Kurth. *La Frontière Linguistique*, vol. ii., p. 189.

² H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 189.

³ L. Mariot. *L'Emploi du Flâmand dans la Chancellerie de Charles VI.*, tome lvii., p. 55. Bibliothèque de l'Ecole de Chartres. 1896.

Jean Sans Peur, at an early date, took care to familiarise his heir with the language and customs of the lands over which he was one day to rule and that his successor spent a greater part of his youth at the Princenhof of Gent than at the Hôtel d'Arbois in Paris."¹

Philip the Good acted in like manner with regard to his son, Charles the Bold, who became, at the age of thirteen, "King of the Cross-Bow Guild" at Brugge, where he learnt to speak Netherlandish fluently.² That solicitude bears witness to the accommodating diplomacy of the princely house, and also to the attachment of the Flemings to their tongue.

Professor Kurth himself admits that the Burgundians introduced French and used Netherlandish when they desired the services of the Flemings.

"It is a fact that the Dukes of Burgundy made French prevail in the central administration which they established, and that they created at Lille a Council of Flanders, where Flemish applicants had first to get their documents translated into French, but that was because they had no idea of a linguistic problem, and because their attention had not yet been drawn to the difficulties which arise in a

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 235.

² *Ibid.*, p. 310.

68 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

country from linguistic differences. This does not imply, however, that these princes did not understand that they would be pleasing their subjects by using their language when addressing them. *Therefore each time that they stand in need of services from their people of Flanders we find them speaking Netherlandish.*¹ When Philip the Good asked the citizens of Gent to follow him to the Siege of Calais, he bade his delegate speak to them in Netherlandish. When, in 1446, this same prince desired to make the people of Gent agree to the introduction of the Salt Tax he caused to be read to them, in their own language, a long statement, in which he recalled with pleasure his youth passed among the Flemings. And in 1492, at the Assembly of Dendermonde (Termonde), when he tried to incite them against their former aldermen, he had first of all a statement in Netherlandish read to them and afterwards addressed them himself in the same language. Charles the Bold likewise did not disdain to use Netherlandish when he wanted to placate the people during the troublous times of his inauguration. When, on the other hand, the princes were at loggerheads with their subjects, they affected to speak nothing but French and insisted that they should be addressed in that tongue."

¹ The italics are mine.

Such an attitude shows diplomacy rather than love ; but it also proves how greatly the Flemings were attached to their language and how deeply they must have been grieved at the French influences introduced by the dukes. Premeditated or not, it is undeniable that they existed. It was undeniable from the circumstance that a French- and a Netherlandish-speaking population were alike subject to the monarchical, centralised autocratic government of a French duke. The dukes learned Netherlandish, but could not renounce their French soul. The language of the Court remained French.

“The French tastes and manners introduced by the new dynasty, together with the use of the French tongue, familiarised the favourite residence with an exotic licence of life.”¹

The dukes being French, their Court was so too. And the Court was, in particular, the central administration, the Great Council, the Court of Justice. These were French *per se*.

When the house of Burgundy left France to settle for good in the Netherlands, their most active agents followed them in great numbers.

“Only the Burgundian and Picardian nobles, however, were to be found at Court, occupying the public offices and entirely submissive to

¹ *The Cambridge Modern History*, vol. i., p. 419.

70 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

their Sovereign. They attracted the noblemen by making them royal allowances, by granting them gifts of land or money, offices at court, etc.

“Before long, the favour of the prince constituted the only chance of success in political and social life. In the States-General the clergy were granted the first place ; they, as well as the nobles, therefore, became supporters of the policy of the dukes. By such methods, by persuasion, by distribution of money—two factors in transforming the institutions of the Belgian principalities into a monarchical rule—they sought to attain their end.”¹

However, the offices of the central administration were granted by preference to Burgundians, Frenchmen and Picardians, who had followed the dukes. The Great Council was composed of relatives of the prince, of councillors, representative, as far as possible, of the several provinces, and, lastly, of juriconsults and knights, upon whom the duke conferred the title of Councillor.²

By its wealth, its splendour, its favours, by the Order of the Golden Fleece, instituted by Philip the Good at Brugge, the Court was the centre of attraction for the nobles and the rich.

¹ Professor L. Van der Essen. *A Short History of Belgium*.

² H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 391.

These were, as always, the first to succumb, the first to renounce their nationality.

“This aristocracy submits to Court etiquette and fights for the right to serve him [the prince] and consequently to receive his pensions.”

The deracination of our nobility is described as follows by Professor Pirenne, to whom we owe already so many references:—

“The disappearance of the local dynasties, around which the nobility had previously been gathered, allowed the nobles to turn towards a single centre of attraction. From all quarters they flocked to the ducal court, adopting its habits and its language and, by following a similar style of life, losing very quickly the distinctive marks of their origin. The descendants of the old Belgian families, Flemish or Walloon, became intermixed with the Picardians or Burgundian nobles, whom the dukes had brought with them to their new fatherland, and who, together with the Lannoys, the Lalaings, the Croys, the Glynes, the Beerens, the Egmonts, attained, either by fusion or by fortunate alliance, the highest places in the aristocratic hierarchy. Foreign or national, the whole of the nobility aimed at military commands, embassies, or the governorships of provinces.

“Their loyalty did not go so far as to make them consider the rights of the prince as un-

72 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

limited; it did not consent to live under a changeable and headstrong overlordship, leaving the destinies of the country uncontrolled in its hands, but it demanded guarantees against autocracy.”¹

Frequent creations, from the time of Philip the Good, drew into the nobility a crowd of new men, all tried and proved in the service of the prince.

Yet there was no question of serious resistance from the nobility. Their own ambition once satisfied, the nobles paid little attention to their people.

But in the Flemish people itself the love of freedom and independence was too deep-rooted for them to accept radical changes without protest. Moreover, centralisation, commendable enough in itself, damaged the interests of towns and groups, interests dating from the Middle Ages. And, further, had the institution been Flemish in essence, and had it been directed by Flemish dukes, it would not have alienated the people.

Happily, there existed a safety-valve. The very circumstance which was an insurmountable obstacle to the foundation of a Burgundian state was to be a great help in the maintenance of our Flemish nationality.

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 366.

The dukes did not reign as kings, but as vassals, as dukes of Brabant, as counts of Flanders. In the bishopric of Liège alone, which they had conquered by force of arms, did they rule autocratically. Consequently the Burgundian state remained an agglomeration of states, each of which retained its autonomy, and thus its own proper existence. Nevertheless this safety-value was insufficient. Centralisation conflicted too much with ancient customs. The Burgundian rule resembled too greatly a foreign yoke, and the Flemish people tried to shake it off by long-drawn and very often bloody struggles. It is beyond the scope of this work to give an account of the ups and downs of the fight, its successes, its failures. We shall give but a sketch of it, in so far only as it concerns the linguistic struggle and leads up to the development of the Flemish Movement.

“The struggles against the Burgundian dynasty by several of our provinces, towards the end of the fourteenth and at the beginning of the fifteenth centuries, gave a peculiar character to the claims of the national language. The princes were foreigners, and spoke French only; that was enough to make Netherlandish in Flanders, and German in Luxemburg, the rallying sign as it were of patriotism and of

74 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

the spirit of freedom ; and by a quite natural reaction the Burgundian party pretended to treat these languages as enemy tongues.”¹

The creation of the Court of Lille was the first cause of the Flemish Movement. The Flemings were all the more incensed at its foundation as from the time of Louis of Male Netherlandish had been the official language in use between count and people.

“ We need not wonder, therefore, if Jean Sans Peur at his accession to the throne was overwhelmed with protestations. He was begged to reduce the authority of the court to those matters only which concerned romance, to establish it in the territory of the county on this side of Lcic [Lys] and to assure to suitors the right of using their ‘ mother tongue.’ ”²

It seems at first sight strange that the Flemings waited so long before taking decided action. For the court had been created in 1386, and not before 1405 did protestations rain upon Duke John. The Flemings, as “ Realpolitikers,” had bided their time for exerting pressure on their prince.

Duke John was on the point of waging war against the Duke of Orleans ; he stood in need

¹ Professor Kurth. *La Frontière Linguistique*, vol. ii., p. 42.

² H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 376.

of the aid of the Flemings, and to secure it he was compelled to abolish certain very unwelcome "innovations."

"For indeed linguistic pride, if I may use the term, began to show itself among the Flemings. The Flemish communes availed themselves of the opportunity."¹

Complying with the wishes of the Flemish folk, the duke resolved to divide the Council of Lille into two parts: financial matters continued to be controlled by the Court of Lille, but the administration of justice was transferred to Oudenaerde, in "Flamingant Flanders," under the name of "Council of Flanders." Here Flemish lawsuits were conducted in Netherlandish, and here in Netherlandish the lawyers might plead.²

Meanwhile French influences in the central administration did not discontinue. In 1409 Jean Sans Peur decided that the procurator of the Chamber should correspond in French with the central government in order that the chancellor and others who were not acquainted with the Netherlandish language might peruse the documents.³

This political régime continued till the end

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 349.

² *Ibid.*, p. 376.

³ *Placaeten van Vlaanderen*, vol. i., p. 238.

of the eighteenth century. But the Council itself was successively transferred to Gent, to Kortrijk (Courtrai), to Gent again, to Dendermonde (Termonde), to Yper, and, lastly, once more to Gent.

All tax-collectors and officials were to submit their accounts to the Court of Yper, and all sales, assignments, etc., had to be transacted before it.

But the Flemings did not desist. "In 1451, during their struggle with Philip the Good, the captains of Gent made the decision that all writing should be in Netherlandish. The growing relations with the Low German merchants of the Hanse towns made it eminently the language of business. The increase in the number of elementary schools in the towns made it possible for the people of the communes to read and write it."

The opposition of the communes to centralisation, of which the linguistic struggle was a manifestation, often resulted in revolt.¹ The last rising was quelled when the citizens of Gent were beaten on the 23rd July 1453, at Gavere, by the army of Philip the Good. Two thousand men of Gent had to endure the humiliation of entreating the duke's mercy in French.²

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 238.

² *Ibid.*, p. 349.

The official French institutions must have spread French influences, more especially among the functionaries in immediate touch with the central administration. More particularly must this have been the case in Flanders than in Brabant, where also the dukes met with opposition from the people. John IV. was compelled to alter the Burgundian institution of Vilvoorde. The new regulation¹ of 1422 created a permanent council, called Court of Brabant, composed of representatives of the clergy, of the nobility and of the communes. Foreigners were absolutely excluded from it. A council chamber was also created at Brussel,² where the language difficulty played its part also, as may be seen by the fact that Philip the Good, on the occasion of his installation, was allowed by the "States"³ to appoint two foreigners, provided the candidates knew Netherlandish.⁴

The Flemish struggle had not been fruitless. Under Philip the Good there was not one official who did not know Netherlandish.

The administration of Brabant was made in

¹ *Placaeten van Brabant*, vol. vi., p. 379.

² H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 381.

³ By "States" are meant the three orders—namely, "prelates, barons, and knights and the towns of Brabant" (*prelaets, baenrotsen, ende smalheeren ende die steden van Brabant*).

⁴ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 381.

78 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

Netherlandish. The accounts of the duchy of Brabant, which till 1373 had been kept in Latin, were from that time to be kept in Netherlandish. But again the Flemings were not to be soothed with theoretical concessions. In the new regulation it was laid down definitely that officials should know both Netherlandish and French.¹

“Further, by the New Rule, which the duke had to accept in 1422, the keeper of the ‘Leenboek’ was to know *waelsch ende dietsch* [Walloon and Netherlandish]. At the States-General, members spoke either in French or else by first using one of these languages and immediately afterwards translating into the other.”²

We must not forget that part of the Walloon country belonged to the duchy.

The consequence was that under the Burgundians, whose system of centralisation was a grave menace, the Netherlandish language made considerable progress.

“Of course one should not believe lightly that every official spoke both languages fluently. In 1434 the Pensionary of Brussel, Peter A. Thyms (van der Heyden), reserves to himself the right to keep silence in circumstances

¹ Professor Kurth. *La Frontière Linguistique*.

² H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 446.

where he ought to speak in French in the name of the city.”¹

“In the same manner, after some temporary difficulties at the outset, the use of the national languages was arranged in conformity with the wishes of the people, at any rate till the accession of Charles the Bold.

“The reproach so often made against the house of Burgundy of having intended systematically to Frenchify the Netherlands is flatly contradicted by facts. If it be true that French, which had already spread considerably among the upper classes since the twelfth century, became necessarily, under the new dynasty, the language of the central government, on the other hand, its influence decreased in the internal administration of the Flemish provinces. It is sufficient to go through any cartulary to convince oneself that Netherlandish was much more used by the local officials during the fifteenth century than during the fourteenth. The spread of education favoured the progress of Netherlandish to the detriment of Latin and French. At Yper it took the place of French, which had been the official language of the commune all through the Middle Ages.”²

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 384.

² *Ibid.*

80 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

“The Peace of St Jacques (1487) made obligatory on the public notaries in the country of Liège a knowledge of both languages.”¹

Thus from the fourteenth century the Flemish tongue made notable progress. Professor Kurth is of the same opinion as Professor Pirenne.

“Henceforth the Netherlandish language is politically emancipated; there is no longer any province of public or private life which is shut to it, and so, after 1300, it becomes useless to cite the documents, both numerous and varied, by which Netherlandish succeeded in winning its place.”²

Undoubtedly Netherlandish made progress, but it would be rash to conclude with Professor Pirenne that the Burgundians did not oppose that progress. The Belgian Government ever since 1830 has been systematically Frenchifying and to this is due the reaction that furthered the Netherlandish tongue. Oppression is the best agent for rousing consciousness. Wherefore it is more than probable that if Netherlandish made progress under the Burgundians, such progress was due to reaction. I feel very much inclined to believe it. It is remarkable that everything appertaining to court and nobility,

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 446.

² Professor Kurth. *La Frontière Linguistique*, vol. ii., p. 37.

their deliberations, etc., is French; whilst, on the other hand, everything in which the people has a voice, the Joyous Entry of the prince, etc., is Netherlandish. Such was still the case, for instance, when Charles the Bold, who succeeded Philip the Good in 1467, made his Joyous Entry into Antwerpen and took the oath of fidelity to the Charter, which expressly stated that no foreigner should be appointed sheriff or alderman, and that Netherlandish should be the official tongue.

What gives more substance to our belief is the opposition of the Flemish people to the parliament instituted by Charles the Bold, and composed of two presidents, four knights, six *maîtres de requête de l'hôtel*, and twenty councillors, eight of whom belonged to the clergy and twelve to the laity, a solicitor-general and three registrars who were to translate the documents sent to them in Netherlandish. At the outset most of them were Burgundians.¹

Parliament then was a court of law, and not to be likened in any way to a modern parliament.

We see how the people opposed parliament.

“It remained unpopular by reason of its slow Roman procedure, and the use of the French language to which it adhered.”²

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 392.

² *The Cambridge Modern History*, vol. i., p. 431.

82 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

The occasion was soon to present itself for passing from passive resistance to deeds.

When Mary of Burgundy, still very young, succeeded to Charles the Bold in 1467, the King of France, Louis XI., availed himself of the opportunity to attack the Burgundian state. It was almost without army. The deputies of Flanders, of Hainaut, of Holland assembled at Gent and decided to raise an army of 120,000 men. But first their rights and then their blood! Compelled by necessity, Mary of Burgundy signed "Het Groot Voorrecht" (The Great Privilege), by which the freedom of the towns was recognised, and by which she swore that in future public offices would be given to natives, that Netherlandish would be the language of all official documents, that the administration of the mint would be entrusted to nationalists acquainted with the Netherlandish tongue, and that the same rule would apply to the members of the "Council of Flanders."¹ Further, the States were granted the right to assemble whenever they desired.

The Flemings were now masters of the situation; the French tongue was banished. The copy of "The Great Privilege" sent to Mons was in Netherlandish.² Parliament was

¹ Professor Kurth. *La Frontière Linguistique*, vol. ii., p. 49.

² H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. iii., p. 10, note.

abolished and replaced by a "Great Council." But this Great Council was permitted to busy itself only with those matters which did not concern directly the special councils—*i.e.* its competency was restricted considerably. The Great Privilege, therefore, aimed at decentralisation, and consequently at combating French influence.

This is even more clearly demonstrated by the fact that on the very day "The Great Privilege" was signed by Mary of Burgundy the Flemings had a special "Charter" granted them by which Flanders was recognised "to be an independent principality."¹

Many linguistic grievances were carefully settled in it and the government of the county entrusted to the members of Flanders.

What the Flemings thus called into existence was nothing but *administrative separation* in as thorough a manner as was possible—certainly beyond the limits of wisdom. And indeed it could not be otherwise. For owing to the fact that Brabant, Limburg and Antwerpen were fiefs of the German Empire, they could not be joined to Flanders under one government. Consequently the Flemish folk continued to be separated. But even if such a union had been possible, complete Flemish

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. iii., p. 13.

84 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

solidarity did not yet exist. The Flemings on this side of the Schelde did not all agree with those on the other side, as later events will show.

Nevertheless the nationalist movement in both districts was already very strong. The attitude of the Flemings proved that with them, as everywhere, a national linguistic movement and democracy go hand in hand. The foreigners who had introduced French practices were so greatly hated that the representatives of the central government at Gent, Hugonet and Humberecourt were condemned to death.

With this we conclude the Burgundian era. In spite of the French Court, and its tendency to centralisation, the Flemish Movement made much headway. Professors Pirenne and Kurth both agree on this.

The Flemish folk grew more conscious of itself, while the nobility alone became more French in character. The contrary, indeed, would be astonishing.

“The permanent hostility of Flanders to the Crown, the abandoning of the fairs of Champagne by the merchants, the growing independence of the territorial dynasties with regard to the Valois, the weakening of the monarchy during the Hundred Years War,

the decay of literature and of the arts which one observes in the kingdom at the same period, and lastly, the loss of Artois and afterwards of Walloon Flanders, insensibly freed the Netherlands from the hegemony of their southern neighbours, as much in the political sphere as in the intellectual. True, the French language was far from disappearing from Flemish territory. It was preserved at the princely Court, among the nobility and the richer bourgeois families, who continued sending their children to the Walloon cities to learn it.”¹

To prove his assertion Professor Pirenne cites the example of thousands? No; of two children. *Ab uno disce omnes.*

And a second proof?

“As early as the fourteenth century, schoolmasters compose little conversation manuals for the teaching of French.”

How is it possible for a scholar like Professor Pirenne to build up a historical thesis on such flimsy grounds, knowing as he does how Flemings have to toil long years to learn French? If children had to learn from a small conversation manual 'twas little French they knew!

As a further proof he says: “The princes corresponded in it with their bailiffs and

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 445.

86 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

councillors.” On the contrary Netherlandish made important progress.

“ But if French maintains the ground gained, it does not conquer fresh fields. On the other hand, Netherlandish plays a part of steadily increasing importance. In nearly all towns it takes the place of Latin in current official documents, in the keeping of the land registers, and in the making out of accounts. The democratic revolution, which gave the artisans a part in public life, was, of course, favourable to its progress.”¹

French literature was no longer read except by nobles.

“ As for French literature in Belgium during the Burgundian period, its output was mainly devoted to the aristocracy, and consisted chiefly of historical material. The names of the historians, Jean le Bel, Jean Froissart, Monstrelet and Chastelain, are well known. Froissart was a cosmopolitan writer, and most of the historians of his school showed only dynastic learning. There was no question of patriotism. They praised the Burgundian dukes because these dukes were their protectors and benefactors.”²

Was the Flemish people bilingual ?

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 446.

² Professor Van der Essen. *A Short History of Belgium*, p. 89.

Absolutely not.

Professor Pirenne will acknowledge so himself.

"On both sides of the linguistic boundary, the 'Rhetoricians,' here in French, there in Netherlandish, showed the same fecundity and enjoyed an equal popularity. . . . During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries French literature enjoyed in the Netherlands the privilege of providing the aristocracy with reading matter. If, during the first half of the fourteenth century, Duke John III. of Brabant still displayed a keen interest in Netherlandish poetry, which he himself cultivated with success, after his time French reigned supreme at the princely courts."

"The accession of the house of Burgundy only consecrated and confirmed the position gained by the French language in the Low Countries; it did not create it." ²

We conclude: during the Burgundian era the Flemish folk was Flemish. In Flanders there existed no such thing as a bilingual people.

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 454.

² *Ibid.*, p. 455.

CHAPTER III

CEDED BY THE HABSBURGS TO SPAIN

MARY OF BURGUNDY, the young heiress of the rich and powerful house of Burgundy, was the object of the diplomatic marriage-makers. The Flemings also were deeply concerned in her marriage. In the end she married Maximilian, son of the Emperor Frederic III., and, by doing so, handed over the Netherlands to the Habsburg dynasty as her bridal portion. Her wedding took place at the Princenhof at Gent on the 18th August 1477.

The Flemings had consequently to assume a new patriotism. This was not altogether to their liking. Yet when, shortly afterwards, Louis XI., King of France, attacked the country, they followed Maximilian to war, singing, "sturdy and strong, and shouting in Netherlandish: 'Flanders the Lion!'"

But a great misfortune befell the Flemings. Mary of Burgundy died unexpectedly, when still quite young, on the 27th March 1482. By her will she appointed Maximilian to govern the Netherlands, with the title of Regent, in the name of the elder of her two children,

Philip and Margaret. The States submitted, but the Regency did not last long. At the death of Frederic III., Maximilian succeeded to his father as Emperor of Germany.

In the meantime Philip grew, and was presently old enough to take over the government. He made his "Joyous Entry" at Leuven on the 9th September 1494. He married Joan of Castile at Antwerpen. By the death of Don Juan, brother of Joan of Castile, who himself had married the sister of Philip the Fair, and also by the death of this sister, Philip the Fair became King of Spain in 1500. This same year saw the birth of his son Charles, who was one day to be the great Emperor Charles V.

Philip died on 25th September 1506.

During the reigns of Maximilian and Philip the Fair the Netherlands had been a pawn in the policy of the Habsburgs and of Spain; and now, Philip's son, Charles of Luxemburg, being only six years old, for the second time Maximilian was given the Regency over the Netherlands. But as Emperor he could not leave Germany, and so entrusted his daughter Margaret with the government of the Low Countries. She was a stranger to the Flemish; she did not even know their language. She established her court at Mechelen, fulfilled

90 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

her duties carefully, but lived quite apart from the people. Her government lasted till January, 1515, when Charles was invested at Brussels by the States-General.

Was the great hope to be realised at last—the hope that the Flemish people would be governed again by a Flemish prince, as was the case before the Burgundian epoch? For was not Charles a native of Gent, was he not born in the midst of his people? Unhappily the dream did not come true. Charles had lost his mother too soon, and his tutors had not provided that he should be taught the language of the people he was one day to rule over. Charles knew French only.¹

Yet, during the first years of his administration, Charles pursued a policy that furthered the interests of Flanders. But that policy was short-lived. After the death of his grandfather, Ferdinand III., he solemnly assumed the title of King of Spain. The ceremony took place in 1516 at the Church of St Gudule in Brussel. The change was a misfortune for the country, for shortly afterwards he went to Spain, to carry out no longer a Netherlandish but a Spanish policy. Once more the Flemish people was sacrificed. From Spain he reigned over Flanders, with Margaret as an inter-

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. ii., p. 83.

mediary, again named Regent. On the whole, the situation remained satisfactory; the people were well pleased, for the news of Charles V.'s accession to the Imperial throne in 1519 was received with joy in Flanders. But the joy was premature. Flanders became an outpost of Spain, and on its territory were waged the wars against France. True, Antwerpen became prosperous, but the town also had to pay the bulk of the cost of the war.

Charles was clever. The nobles had their seats in the council of Margaret, and he had ordered her to do nothing without asking their advice. Margaret was intelligent and had a will of her own, and acted with much self-reliance, without consulting Spain, which was not the case with Mary of Austria, who succeeded her in 1531. Under Mary's regency the Court was transferred from Mechelen to Brussel, whither Charles himself came to invest her on 24th January 1531. He made use of his stay in Brussel to organise the Netherlands on the political side.

After his departure one difficulty arose after another. War broke out with France. The Anabaptist doctrines spread. Gent became involved in great troubles through endeavouring to regain its ancient liberties, and there was an armed revolt. Charles returned from Spain

92 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

to inflict exemplary punishment, and Gent lost its last liberties; even the "Charter" of the city was taken away. The last resistance to centralisation was overcome.

Again Charles had to declare war against France and Gelderland. The decision was in his favour, and war ended in the union of the Low Countries. A beautiful and powerful state was born. In the south, fortresses were built as a protection against France. Antwerpen, too, was fortified. The Netherlands constituted a powerful combination strong enough to resist the enemy. Charles settled among us in 1544, and by his world-wide influence he succeeded in obtaining from the Diet of Augsburg, in 1548, recognition of the independence of the Low Countries, on the condition that yearly tribute was paid. By the Pragmatic Sanction of 1549 he settled the hereditary rights of the United Netherlands, and all the provinces acquiesced. A new state had been called to life, but in spite of its solidity it suffered from a defect—an essential defect: it had not been erected in its own interest or in the interests of its inhabitants, but merely as an advanced post of Spain. It was only later, however, that the people were to realise this.

When Philip, Charles' son, made his tour

through the Low Countries, festivities took place everywhere. Following Philip's marriage with the English princess, Mary Tudor, Charles convened the States-General at Brussel on 25th October 1555. In a speech full of feeling, and with tears, he abdicated. Philip, who knew neither French nor Netherlandish, delivered his inaugural speech in Spanish. This destroyed the first favourable impression. Yet everything pointed to a happy and peaceful government. There were no clouds in the political sky, either at home or abroad. The nobles were satisfied; they had their seats in the Council of State. But content was only apparent. Philip himself, at Brussel, had none about him but Spaniards. The Council of State—that is, the nobles—was never consulted, and the Netherlands were full of Spanish troops.

Trouble could not fail to arise between the States-General, the nobles and the Crown over the budget.

In August, 1559, Philip bade farewell to the States-General and returned to Spain, there to remain. Margaret of Parma was entrusted with the reins of government. Emmanuel Philibert of Savoy, another foreigner, was appointed Lieutenant-General. This, remember, was on the eve of the religious troubles

94 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

which shook the whole of Europe. The "League of Nobles" sprang into existence to fight the Spanish regime. The nobles had been won over by the Burgundians and allowed themselves to be absorbed by them; they had been dazzled by splendour, wealth, well-paid offices and the Golden Fleece. They felt themselves neglected under the Spanish rule and they had no good reason for becoming Spanish patriots. On the contrary they had every reason to regret the Burgundian rule. They communicated their discontent to the people. When the Flemish people had revolted under the Burgundians, in defence of their liberties and their linguistic rights, they had been deserted by the nobles. Now when the interests of the nobles were in jeopardy the support of the people was expected. The nobles forgot that, to the people, Spanish rule, at least till then, was neither better nor worse than any other, and they forgot, too, that once they had roused the passions of the people they would not be able to check its fury.

This warlike spirit of the people, which had been gradually forgetting the civic liberties fought for during centuries, found an opportunity of exercising itself in the religious quarrels which now involved the Netherlands in unceasing strife. The political revolt against

Spain degenerated into a religious war—the war of the “Gueux” (beggars), as the rebels called themselves. That war, with its inquisition, with its truce—“the Pacification of Gent”—with its “Perpetual Decree” recalling the Spanish soldiers from Holland, with all the vicissitudes of Granvelle, Alva, Don Juan, Farnèse, need not be described here. The consequences were appalling. Thousands of the best Flemings left our provinces, and the state, once so full of promise, was rent in two when the struggle ended. The Protestant Northern Netherlands formed a separate state. Antwerpen, the greatest commercial city of the world, was ruined.

“The population [of Belgium] was reduced by at least 50 per cent.”¹

Our Netherlandish race was divided into two, to be reunited more than two centuries later for a short space of time.

On the eve of the seventeenth century the Flemish people at last enjoyed a little peace.

King Philip resolved to make an independent state of the Southern Netherlands, to be ruled by his daughter, Isabella, who was married to Albert, Archduke of Austria. Isabella reigned from 1598 to 1633. A truce of twelve years had been concluded with the Northern Netherlands.

¹ Professor Van der Essen. *A Short History of Belgium.*

96 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

Flanders now witnessed one of the most brilliant periods in the province of art. The reign of the Archduke, however, did not last long enough. He died in 1621. The period of autonomy—the only one the Flemish people ever knew—which had lasted for thirty years was over. Isabella was still to govern, but only at the mandate of Spain. During her government the Thirty Years War broke out, and the country was occupied by Spanish troops. Attacked from the north by the Northern Netherlands, and from the south by France under the political lead of Richelieu, the Southern Netherlands emerged from the struggle with many wounds and many losses. The Northern Netherlands, alarmed at the great progress made by France, and anxious to preserve the Southern Netherlands as a buffer-state protecting them from France, inclined to peace, which, after eighty long years of suffering, was concluded at Munster in 1648. Spain, by acquiescing in the closing of the Schelde, sacrificed the country's future to Holland.

Exhausted, impoverished, the Southern Netherlands fell a prey to the ambitious plans of the French king, Louis XIV., who snatched French Flanders by force of arms ; it was never again to be joined to Flanders. In this manner the Flemings were separated into three groups :

the inhabitants of the Northern Netherlands, those of the Southern Netherlands and the Flemings of French Flanders.

At the end of the seventeenth century broke out the war that was to deliver the Southern Netherlands into the hands of Austria.

The policy of the Habsburgs was an imitation and a continuation of that of the Burgundians—a policy of centralisation.

Maximilian appointed a foreigner to the post of chancellor and included foreigners in the council.

This hated, imperialistic policy once more urged the towns of Flanders to take up arms, and Maximilian was compelled to yield. By the treaty of 12th May 1488 the “Oud Voorrecht” (Old Privilege) of 1477 came again into force.

The policy of Philip the Fair was monarchical and absolute, but more moderate. True, the parliament of Mechelen was reinstated, under the name of “Great Council.” It was composed of natives, but they were all noblemen. Even in his council the greater part of the members were picked from the national aristocracy.

Charles V., especially in the first years of his reign, pursued a similarly moderate policy.

98 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

The political leader was a native of the country, Chièvres. Even the office of chancellor was, for the first time, given to a native, Jean de Sauvage.

Together with centralisation in home policy, Charles aimed at freedom from foreign interference.

He burst the last bonds that tied Flanders and the duchy of Brabant to the Empire. In this manner disappeared of themselves the remaining differences between the inhabitants on the left and on the right banks of the Schelde. From that time onwards the Burgundian states constituted one solid whole. This unification was pregnant with promises for the future. Under the regency of Margaret, who, though not popular, was yet of one mind with the states, there was much ground for hoping that in future the states would become independent.

With Mary of Hungary that hope gradually dwindled for the governed, as we saw, in the interest of Charles V., who himself became more and more of a Spaniard and pursued a wholly Spanish policy, looking upon the Netherlands as a mere outpost of Spain.

With this in mind Charles endeavoured to organise the Netherlands. When he visited the Low Countries in 1531 he spent all his available time in strengthening the royal authority, with-

out, however, destroying the local autonomy. He created the three "Conseils Collatéraux," which continued to exist for centuries. He also prepared the "Eeuwig Edikt" (Perpetual Decree), which was the foundation of the common legislation of the whole of the Netherlands.

The "Conseils Collatéraux" were, in fact, so many ministries: the Political Ministry or Council of State, the Ministry of Justice or Privy Council, and the Ministry of Finance.

The Council of State was composed of nobles nominated for life, and was an advisory body. The Privy Council and the Council of Finance were directly dependent on the prince, or on his representative. Their members were taken from the ranks of the jurisconsults among the middle classes.

The Privy Council was at one and the same time a legislative body and a court of justice to settle disputes with the provinces.

The organisation of Charles V. was not confined to the central administration. Through special decrees the competency of the councils (Conseils Anciens) was regulated. Since 1531 they had been controlled by the Privy Council. But in order to spare the feelings of the provinces the members were drawn from the provinces over which they were to exercise

jurisdiction. In each province a governor was appointed as delegate of Charles V. He was chosen from the higher aristocracy and the Knights of the Order of the Golden Fleece. These governors were charged with the command of the *gendarmerie*, the care of the fortifications, the convocation of the provincial states, the presidency of the Courts of Justice and the issue of decrees.

Aldermen were appointed with the co-operation of the commissaries of the prince, were no longer subjected to the influence of the guilds, and were exclusively chosen from among the rich. The authority of the "amman," or bailiff, who represented the sovereign, was strengthened. Yet the towns did not lose the whole of their authority. No decision committing the city might be taken without the consent of the delegates of the communes (usually three in number), of the aldermen, of the ancient magistracy and the assembly of the guilds (*l'échevinage l'ancien magistrat et l'assemblée des métiers*).¹

Let us now examine the situation with regard to languages.

According to Professor Pirenne the Court was exclusively French. On the other hand he

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. iii., p. 180 and fgg.

tells us that the Archduke Albert, Philip II. and the Duchess of Parma did not know French, and that the Duke of Alva pretended not to know it. Flanders was ruled by Spaniards; Flanders was occupied by Spanish troops; sermons were preached in Spanish; there was even some talk of sending Flemings to schools in Spain.¹ The Court language, then, must necessarily have been Spanish during a long period.

All the same, Netherlandish was not totally excluded. The Prince of Orange, who had been educated at Court, at Brussel, spoke and wrote Netherlandish very well.

Of greater weight is the circumstance that the regulations of the Council of Brabant, established at Brussels, were entirely in Netherlandish.

The use of languages at the Supreme Court of Justice was regulated as follows:—

“The councillors and commissaries shall examine the witnesses and take their depositions. And these depositions shall be written in Latin, French or Netherlandish, namely, in that of the three aforementioned languages which the witness speaks and has used for his deposition.”²

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. iv.

² *Placaeten*. Art. 45: “Die Raeds-luyden en Commissarissen *sullen die ghetuyghen examineeren, ende heure depositie pronuncieeren. . . . De welke depositie geschreven sal wesen in Latyn, Walsch, oft Duytch, te weten in alsulcken vande voorsz drie taelen, als die getuyghe spreekt ende ghedeponceert sal hebben.”

102 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

This, surely, contradicts the argument of Professor Pirenne, who maintains that the upper classes had become entirely French. Were this established, how could they possibly perform their judicial functions in Netherlandish?

The States-General were seldom called together, and if they were it was only to hear a statement of government matters and to grant subsidies. The members of the States-General were chosen by the Provincial States, which, however, were not themselves chosen. Custom indicated the prelates, the barons and the townsmen. Representation was very unequally divided among these different sections. The governors were nominated by the Court.

Now, in what language were the proceedings at the States-General? To say that Netherlandish was not used at all is inaccurate. The speeches were translated into Netherlandish.

"The Prince himself, the governor, or some high-placed official outlined the purpose of the convocation. He spoke French, and, at least during the first years of Charles the Fifth's reign, his speech was usually translated for the deputies of the Netherlandish provinces."¹

At the Joyous Entries Netherlandish was the official language. No less inaccurate is the assertion of Professor Pirenne that transactions

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. iii., p. 197.

with other countries were always carried on in Latin or French. He writes :

“ It was in French that the princes corresponded, not only with each other, but also with the Kings of France and England. They used Latin in their relations with the Empire and the Papacy. Netherlandish does not appear as a diplomatic language.”¹

The treaty of 30th May 1647, between the Archduke Leopold William and M. du Plessis Bellièvre, representing the King of France, of which there is a copy at Brussel, is written in Netherlandish. In the book of the “ Edicts ” (*Placaeten*)² we come across several documents, all written in Netherlandish ; thus we find an edict against the Bishop of Liège (13th January 1477) ; two agreements between the city of Antwerpen and the Bishop of Camerijk (Cambrai) (13th January 1490 and 9th September 1490) ; a union and confederation between the three states of Brabant and the land beyond the Maas (4th November 1415) ; a treaty between the city of Antwerpen and Engelbrecht van Nassau (20th April 1437) ; a peace treaty between the states of the Netherlands and the Prince of Orange and the states of Holland and Zeeland (8th November 1576) ; the “ Perpetual

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. iv., p. 456.

² *Placaeten*. Loc. cit.

104 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

Decree" between the Prince of Parma and Piacenza, Governor and Captain-General, on the one hand, and the towns of Douai, Lille and Orchies on the other, concluded at Mons (13th November 1579); the truce concluded between Spain and the United Netherlands (9th April 1609), also the truce of 7th January 1610; an agreement as to the surrender of the beleaguered town of Armentières, an agreement which was concluded in the name of the King of France by his Most Serene Highness the Archduke Leopold William: "Carried out and concluded at Headquarters before Armentières on May 30, 1647"; the world-renowned Treaty of Munster between the King of Spain and the United Netherlands. (The *Procuration* to the plenipotentiaries of the King of Spain is written in Spanish, 13th January 1648.)

Transactions with the provinces took place in Netherlandish. Professor Kurth concludes as follows:—

"During the reign of the house of Burgundy and the first Habsburgs the Central Government communicates with the provinces in Netherlandish; at the 'Joyous Entry' the oath is taken in Netherlandish; all official communications with the Provincial States are in Netherlandish.¹

¹ Professor Kurth; *La Frontière Linguistique*.

“ Never did the Government depart from the rule which demands that the people shall be judged and governed in their mother-tongue. From the end of the fourteenth century to the end of the *ancien regime* those in authority remained convinced that it was not the people's duty to learn the language of its rulers, but the rulers' duty to know the language of their peoples. This principle does not seem to have been once violated. It was required for everyone who, by his functions, came into contact with a certain people to know the language of that people: With regard to this question the stipulations set forth in the ‘Grand Privilege’ cannot be regarded as innovations : long before this we have seen that similar arrangements were agreed to by the most powerful princes of the house of Burgundy.”¹

“ During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Government continued to correspond in Netherlandish with the Flemish communes.”²

Moreover, the army was organised on a Netherlandish footing, at the specific demand of the states :

“ The states themselves, when need arose, showed their concern in matters of language.

¹ Professor Kurth. *La Frontière Linguistique*.

² *Ibid.*

106 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

During that same session of 1600 they 'demanded that the commanders of regiments and other units should be of the same nationality and speak the same language as their soldiers.'¹

Our Flemish soldiers were thus better treated than to-day under Belgian rule.

Here Professor Pirenne shares Professor Kurth's opinion.

"In matters of language the Government takes care not to fall into the abuses with which Charles the Bold is reproached, and in this point at least, it conforms to 'The Grand Privilege' of 1477. The Government sees that the officials know the speech of those whom they administer; it issues Netherlandish decrees in Flemish provinces and makes the judges observe the principle that all cases are to be conducted in the language of the contending parties."² The administration of the provinces and communes was Netherlandish.³

"At Brussel, Latin was used by the aldermen up to the sixteenth century, when Netherlandish took its place."⁴

And again :

"At Brussel, the aldermen invariably used

¹ Professor Kurth. *La Frontière Linguistique*.

² H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. iii., p. 326.

³ Professor Kurth. *La Frontière Linguistique*.

⁴ Henne et Wauters. *Histoire de Bruxelles*, Tome II. i. 597.

Netherlandish after the sixteenth century. In the Act of October 16, 1696, which authorised the advocate Descartes to put in documents in French, the magistrate expressly stipulated that this measure was not to be taken as a precedent.”¹

“The Council of Brabant in 1651 reprimanded the Magistrate of Brussel, because he had sent in a report written in French.”

The Emperor Charles never gave an order as Emperor, but as Duke of Brabant, Count of Flanders, etc.; administrative separation was a fact; executive, tribunals and legislature were Netherlandish in the Flemish half, Walloon in the Walloon half, of the country.

The constitutions to which the Duke of Brabant had to swear allegiance leave no slightest doubt on that subject.

Article V. does not allow any doubt in the matter, and requires that the seven dignitaries, of which one will be Chancellor and Keeper of the Seal, shall know three languages—namely, Latin, Walloon and Netherlandish.

Article VIII. decrees that “all letters, open or closed, which shall henceforth be given and read in our Council of Brabant, either for us or at the request of the parties, shall be written, despatched, and sent out in the language which

¹ *Histoire du Conseil de Brabant*, tome ii., p. 85.

is spoken at the place to which they are sent.”¹

De Pape² asserts that the lawyers were obliged to conduct their cases in the language which was spoken at the place where the action lay.

In the province of Liège, says M. Jottrand, eleven Walloon and twelve Flemish communes were represented at the diet. There the Flemings spoke Netherlandish and the Walloons French; the Burgomaster of Tongeren (Tongres) translated the Netherlandish speeches; the Burgomaster of Huy translated the French speeches.

Army and law courts were thus Netherlandish; the administration was Netherlandish

¹ *Plakkaerten van Brabant versameld door Antonium Anselmo, i. boekdeel*, pp. 195 and 196.

Artikel V.: “Item (wij zweeren) dat wij onderhouden sullen seven weerdige personen, daaraf die een cancellier ende segheleere wesen sal, geboren van onsen voorseyde Lande van Brabant, ende kunnende drije talen te weten Latijn, Walsch, en Dietsch. Die welcke onsen voorseyden Segel bewaren sal. Ende de viere geboren, wonende ende geghoeft in onsen voorseyden Lande van Brabant, oft die baenroetstammen in onsen voorschreven lande van Brabant van haer selfs oft van houwelijkxwegen besitten, ende die andere twee van onsent wege van onsen Rade sulen als ons ghenoegeen sal, kunnende die dietsche tale. . . .”

Artikel VIII.: “Item dat alle brieven opene en beslotene die men voortane in onsen Rade van Brabant van onsent weghe, verleenen ende uitseynden sal, hetsy voor ons, of ten versoecke der partien: maken, expedieeren ende uitseynden sal in sulcken talen, als men spreekt ter plaats, daar die ghesonden sullen worden.”

² De Pape. *Traité de la joyeuse Entrée*, p. 82.

except—and this was not always the case—the central government, which was in the hands of foreigners.

What effect, then, had commerce on the language question?

“As in the Middle Ages, the necessities of trade contributed to the spreading of the French language. Netherlandish—which had served as a means of communication with Germany so long as that nation had been represented in the Netherlands by Hanseatic merchants—Netherlandish not being understood by the High German capitalists, who took the place of the Hanse men, the use of French increased. It was in French that business men conversed in the galleries of the cosmopolitan exchange of Antwerpen. It was used in the export trade; for example, at Kortrijk [Courtrai] the seals of the cloth industry bore inscriptions in French.”

We cannot deny the assertion of Professor Pirenne¹ that, during the flourishing period of the sixteenth century, all languages were spoken at Antwerpen. The town was indeed a cosmopolitan city. The great financial houses had representatives there—Fuggers, Welsers, Herwarts. The commercial firms of the world had their central houses there—English,

¹ H. Pirenne. *Belgian Democracy*.

German, Spanish, Portuguese, etc. The houses occupied by many of them still exist to-day. The Flemings, who held a prominent place, were themselves few in number. But we shall show later that, owing to Spanish occupation, Spanish was spoken more often than French. Besides, the French, unlike the other Powers, had no counting-houses in Antwerpen. The relations of Charles V. with François I. were too strained for business relations to be satisfactory, and by the middle of the seventeenth century they were made still more difficult by the trade policy of France. On the other hand, Spanish exerted such great influence that certain goods bore Spanish names.

A fact which would rather prove that business was carried on in Netherlandish for the most part is that :

“Decrees dealing with the merchants, their books, trade and business on sea and on land, saltpetre, gunpowder, export of grain, food-stuffs, horses, pigs, cloth, cobbles, licences, customs, printers, sales, alum, wines, hops, goldsmiths, bills of exchange, insurances, commissions, officers and Lombards, were done in Netherlandish with the exception of a few decrees from the time of Albert and Isabella.”¹

¹ *Placaeten*. Loc. cit.

Professor Pirenne calls Guiccardini to witness :

“ In the middle of the sixteenth century Guiccardini estimates that it [French] will soon be as familiar as the national language in the Flemish provinces, and the Spaniard, Enzinas, regards it as the mother-tongue of the inhabitants, so wide is its diffusion. Notwithstanding the evident exaggeration of these statements, it is certain, at least, that French, exclusively spoken by the nobility and of daily use among the bourgeoisie, has even reached superficially the mass of people. If it is not spoken by them, they at least often understand it, and it is not regarded by them as a foreign tongue. It is the national language of the South, it is acclimatised in the North, and it contributes its share to maintaining the unity of the seventeen provinces : it is with the cry of ‘ Vive le Gueux ’ that the Walloon and Flemish provinces will soon rise against Spain.”¹

Let us not forget that Guiccardini was a foreign banker who lived at Antwerpen, wrote his works in Italian, translating them afterwards into French.

Let us compare what he says with what happens in Canada and what we see in Flanders to-day.

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. iii., p. 270.

112 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

We shall note later on what a small percentage of the inhabitants speak French. Certainly a foreigner living in Antwerpen might move for years in a small French circle of higher bourgeoisie, and afterwards write in good faith : " Everybody in Antwerpen speaks French." Politicians, with French sympathies, daily write to that effect ; and a successor of Professor Pirenne, basing himself not on one, but on a hundred Guiccardinis, will be able to write in three hundred years' time : "*All the Flemings know French.*"

" It is the same at Montreal. Visitors may pass several weeks there, frequenting hotels, banks, shops, railway stations, without ever imagining for a moment that the town is French, judging by the great majority of its inhabitants. English society affects unconsciousness of this fact and bears itself exactly as though it had no French neighbours." ¹

Against the assertion of Professor Pirenne concerning Antwerpen stands that of Professor Kurth, who declares that Antwerpen was inaccessible to the French language.

That the influence of French must have been very small is also proved by the fact, that the tribunals and the administration were Flemish, as has been shown already. That the law

¹ Siegfried. *The Race Question in Canada.* Nash. London.

courts were Flemish is admitted by Professor Pirenne himself. The aldermen sat every Friday in order to hear charges, "the proceedings being conducted in Netherlandish."

But when Professor Pirenne gives as argument the fact that the Flemings went to war with the cry of "Vive les Gueux!" it is plain that it is the Belgian, and not the historian, who is speaking here. Baron de Broqueville, when Prime Minister, used even this argument in order to prove that Flanders was bilingual!

Is England bilingual because the national crest has a French and the Prince of Wales a Netherlandish motto? When people in Antwerpen cry: "Vive le Roi!" at a Joyous Entry are they less Flemish for that?

In which language did the scholars write?

Neither in French nor in Netherlandish, but in Latin.

"At first sight, nothing seems less national than the tendencies which inspire Erasmus and his disciples. We cannot detect in them a single trace of that patriotic spirit so pronounced in the German scholars of their time; and far from applying themselves, like the first French humanists, to the study and cultivation of their mother-tongue, they disdain it as a miserable jargon; they even glory in their ignorance of

114 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

it and assume the right of writing in Latin only.”¹

“No doubt intellectual activity remains vigorous amongst the clergy, but that is just what stifles profane literature, for the Church uses Latin only. The Church perpetuates and increases the discredit with which the followers of Erasmus and the humanists had covered the language of the people. Latin alone, universal like religion and reason, is deemed worthy to express the dignity of thought. Latin also occupies the first place in poetry.”²

In 1653, Gerlinx disdainfully declares that Netherlandish must be content with being heard “in the kitchen and in the tavern.” In that way the national idioms are banished from higher literature. The latter was not only confined almost entirely to the Church—it also bore, if one may say it, the Roman cloak of the Church. Literature remained faithful to the learned tradition of the sixteenth century and the laity, professors at the university, or magistrates who gave their mind to it, accepted the traditional custom.

Let us now consider education.

Professor Pirenne asserts that French educa-

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. iii., p. 296.

² *Ibid.*, p. 455.

tion made great progress, and he produces the following argument: "In 1530 a decree mentions the general custom of sending young men to France to enable them to learn French."¹

It is probable that young men who desired to enter the higher administration—which was permeated with French influences—went abroad to learn French, but unless Professor Pirenne produces a few more proofs we cannot admit that these emigrations were general.

In order to prove his statement he mentions the names of two or three young men who went to France: Jean de Dadizcele when barely ten years old goes to Lille and Arras and stays there with his parents for about six years. On the other hand, Jean de Fynnes, a citizen of Lille, sends his daughter to some friends at Antwerpen so that she may learn Netherlandish.

Are there no more instances? Are no other names known? This is a short list, surely. But Professor Pirenne, by this fact, destroys his assertion that the nobility and higher bourgeoisie were French to the very core! If they were, why did they send their boys to France that they might learn the French tongue? Moreover, he states that French

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. iii. *Recueil des Ordonnances des Pays Bas*, 2e série, tome iii., p. 59.

116 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

was being taught more and more in the schools !

The Professor is nearer truth when he writes :

“Not that it [French] has penetrated more deeply into the mass of the people, nor that it occupies a more considerable place in the administration of the country. The little bourgeoisie, bound to the exercise of local crafts, scarcely feels in Flanders the need of learning French, and it is hardly necessary to say that the Sunday schools do not teach it to their poor pupils ! On the other hand, in the Flemish country the communal administrations, the Provincial States, and the Councils of Justice, deliberate and correspond in Netherlandish. Netherlandish is used in the Courts and by the public notaries in drawing up their deeds, and in the same language edicts and proclamations of all kinds are published.”¹

Pirenne draws a distinction between the different classes of society : the upper classes, by which he means the rich classes, and especially the nobility, are French in spirit ; the other are not. The success of the French language continually grows in the same measure as the power of the aristocracy. Women especially are eager to learn it. It is because the Ursulines

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. iv., p. 459.

come from France that their schools attract all the daughters of the bourgeoisie. No doubt, every bourgeois in the Flemish provinces still speaks Netherlandish, but they have ceased reading it, and as soon as one feels oneself to be "somebody" one takes care to express oneself in French. A few "snobs" even carry this so far as to feign ignorance of the language of the people. If by chance one finds in the libraries, on the same shelf as devotional or professional books, a few literary works, they are French. At the Bar one hears the lawyers quoting French law, French jurists, French acts.

But Professor Pirenne avows that "this spreading of the French language among the governing classes has not manifested itself in one literary activity worthy of the name: therefore only a few mediocre memoirs, a few grotesque dramas, a few disheartening lucubrations by Jesuits, Capucins or *curés* writing for people of fashion!

"And really, this dearth, this puerility cannot surprise us, for everything prevents the nobility from taking part in literary life, or even from constituting a public for real writers. Standing apart from all important affairs, it takes no share in the administration of the country and, so to say, washes its hands of it.

118 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

It is true that the Court of Albert and Isabella had kept the nobility together for a few years, but how could this Court, grouped as it was round foreign princes, exercise a strong and deep influence? As a matter of fact, and making in this respect a striking contrast with the Court of Paris, it exercised no such influence at all. It dazzled the eyes with sumptuous *fêtes*, but it did not have the least influence on people's minds. Besides, it broke up after the death of the archdukes and the courtiers returned to their estates in the depths of the provinces, there to lead a calm and monotonous existence, spent between the care of their domains and that of the local government. There was no pleasure left them save hunting. Nearly all of them were content with the literary culture they had picked up in some Jesuit college."

Professor Pirenne tells us what a strong influence these colleges exerted on the noblemen: "Belonging for the most part to the nobility and the well-to-do bourgeoisie, the pupils acquired from the Jesuit Fathers better than anywhere else the amount of literary knowledge necessary to the man of the world and the professional classes."¹

"The religious order attracted the pick of the young."²

¹ H. Pirenne, *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. iv., p. 37.

² *Ibid.*

But the Jesuits did something else besides school teaching :

“ To understand the activity of the Society, it is sufficient to know that it boasts of 15,206 sermons preached by its members during one single year at the beginning of the seventeenth century, in the provinces of Belgian Flanders. After the sermon the preachers came down from their pulpits and distributed among their congregation devotional booklets in Latin, French and Netherlandish, of which the number of copies printed sometimes amounted to the enormous figure of 15,000 ! ” ¹

In which language did the Jesuits teach and preach ?

1. They certainly taught in Latin. But what place did French and Netherlandish hold ?

At their Antwerp College there were, in 1575, 360 pupils belonging to the richest families. The colleges regularly acted plays before a public audience, sometimes to as many as 4000 people. Dr Stracke, S.J., has made researches to find out in what language the plays were acted at the colleges of Dunkirk, Cassel, Belle (Bailleul), St Winoxbergen, Kortrijk, Ouden-aerde, Yper, Brugge, Aalst, Mechelen, Gent,

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. iv., p. 372, and the work referred to: Paquot. *Mémoires littéraires*, tome xii., p. 288, or *ibid.*, tome xv., p. 227.

Antwerpen and Brussel. It is sufficiently known that the Jesuit colleges attracted by preference the children of rich families. It is equally true that in matters not strictly religious they regulated their conduct according to circumstances. Consequently, the outcome of Father Stracke's investigations must be very weighty.

In the smaller towns of Flanders—even in French Flanders until after the Conquest—the Jesuit theatre was almost exclusively Netherlandish. The three leading towns give the place of honour to Latin. At Gent, however, Netherlandish has the upper hand. At Brussel Latin occupies the first place. But whereas at the college feasts of Brussel more French is used than Netherlandish, at Antwerpen French is seldom used. The plays remain true to the character of the people, as long as French is not required by the rulers of the land.

2. In which language did the Jesuits preach ?

In 1611 the Jesuit community is divided into two bodies, according to the languages which are used—thus, according to the language frontier.¹

“From 1612 the Jesuits preached throughout the whole of the country with the most unheard-of success, so that ‘nearly all the churches were too

¹ P. Stracke. *Was Vlaanderen altijd tweetalig.*

small. For hours before the service the seats were occupied ; people even stood in the sanctuary and clung to the pillars like limpets.' At Antwerpen sermons were preached in Spanish and Netherlandish, perhaps sometimes in French, as was often the case in Brussel. 'The number of sermons preached by us in Low German during one year far exceeds 15,000.' "

The fact that sermons were preached in Spanish is not astonishing. Flanders was occupied by Spaniards and Philip even tried to impose the language.

Professor Pirenne writes :

"The French language finishes its conquest of the nobility and the rich classes. Here are a few examples. At Brussel, in 1638, the Jesuits preach in Flemish three times a week, in French twice a week. At Kortrijk, in the same year, *totius urbis honestiores* are present at the French sermon. (Waldock. *Historica Provinciae Flandro-Belgica S. J.*, ix. 24.)"

Yet Dr Stracke proved that this happened by chance, at Brussel during Lent, and at Kortrijk on a special occasion. And Professor Pirenne does not add that in 1638 eight catechism lessons in Netherlandish were given in the church and one catechism lesson in French in a chapel.

Secondly, Professor Pirenne mentions the 15,000 sermons spoken of above, but he forgets

that they were done in the *Netherlandish* language.

Impartiality is the chastity of history !

The same Fathers did something more ; they wrote. In which language ? Father Stracke tells us :

“ No less in Latin than in Netherlandish, but not in French.”

Willems ¹ declares that in 1508, after more than a century of Burgundian rule, the rich Clares of Gent, all children of patricians, used exclusively Netherlandish codices and books.

There exists in the Imperial Fidei-Commis Library of Vienna a voluminous manuscript of the year 1523, in which is drawn up an inventory of all the libraries and convents extant at that time in the Southern Netherlands. It is a pity it has not been published.

At the end of the fifteenth century everything had to be carried out in Netherlandish at Vilvoorde, because the well-to-do classes did not understand French. “ Till 1492 the aldermen of Vilvoorde gave their judgments in Latin, and it needed a special royal decree to make them use Netherlandish.”²

Had Flanders been bilingual, then undoubtedly popular literature would have been

¹ Willems. *Tijdschrift voor Boek en Bibliotheekwezen*. 1912.

² Professor Kurth. *La Frontière Linguistique*.

so too. But this is not at all the case. The "Chambers of Rhetoricians" in Flanders were exclusively Netherlandish. Their writings were Netherlandish. The translations from Luther, published in 1520, were in Netherlandish. "At the convent of the 'Rich Clares,' an exclusive convent of upper-class people, one finds—if we except Latin Bibles, missals and psalters—Flemish works only, both in prose and in verse. Not one French book or manuscript is to be found there.

Does this not prove in a conclusive manner that these women, though of patrician birth, were thorough Netherlandish women, who did not in the least require French books.¹

In a Papal Bull, dated 12th May 1559, Pope Paul IV. erects new dioceses and settles the boundaries according to the national languages.

"The new circumscriptions followed, as far as was possible, the boundaries of the provinces and the distribution of the national idioms."²

The ecclesiastical authorities in the Low Countries follow the example of His Holiness.

"Philip II. adapted the distribution of the dioceses to the natural distribution of the populations; he took into account the language and the historical groupings of the inhabitants."

¹ Dr Willems. "Pirenne over onze Middeleeuwen." *Ons Vaderland*, 8th December 1917.

² H. Pirenne. Vol. iii., p. 411.

The Jesuits also act in the same way.

Destined to act upon the people the Society divided its provinces according to the linguistic boundary which divided the country into two almost equal parts. The whole of the Flemish districts, as well those of the Low Countries as of the principality of Liège, formed the Flandro-Belgian province, whereas the Gallo-Belgian province included the Walloon districts, to which was attached the German district of Luxemburg.

The Bishop of Liège also followed suit :

“ The jurisdiction of the Bishop of Liège brings the principality into touch with the Flemish and Walloon districts, and these connections are the more intimate because, owing to its Walloon population in the south and its Flemish population in the north, the principality belongs to both nationalities occupying Belgium.”¹

Many proofs might be adduced to show how true the Flemings remained to their national character and language. The Flemings complained of their tongue being slighted at the Court ; but what could they do against autocratic rule ?

“ True, only French is spoken at Court and

¹ Cf. Dr D. J. Stracke, S.J., in his pamphlet, *Was Vlaanderen altijd tweetalig als nu.* Genr. van Melle.

the rhetoricians, as for instance Herpener in 1556, do not fail to complain.”¹

The authorities were conscious of it. When the Emperor Frederic visited the Netherlands, during the regency of his son, Maximilian, he lived for five weeks at St Michael's monastery in Antwerpen. There he presided over the assembly of the States-General, where prelates and delegates from all the towns were present, Gent, Yper and Brugge excepted. His intention was to restore peace. His son Maximilian was present. And to these nobles who, according to Professor Pirenne, had become entirely French, he spoke Netherlandish.

On public occasions the Flemings always acted very decidedly. The charters to which Philip II. had to pledge his faith were presented to him in Netherlandish and were signed by him, although he did not know the language. But the document was translated for him—
“Truly translated into Spanish.”²

In 1598, at the Joyous Entry of Albert, the constitution was also read in Netherlandish. Albert takes the oath first in Netherlandish, then in French.³

The spread of French, then, cannot have been so considerable as Professor Pirenne would

¹ H. Pirenne. Vol. iii., p. 326.

² *Placaeten*. Loc. cit.

³ Professor Kurth. *La Frontière Linguistique*.

make us believe. Yet it had, according to him, very deplorable consequences, the same which we attribute to the growth of French influences in our own days.

“Among a great part of the cultivated and French aristocracy of the Netherlands the knowledge of Latin had spread not less than that of French. How, then, does it happen that, compared with the astonishing activity shown by the former of these two languages, there should be a corresponding sterility of the latter ?

The French of the Low Countries became, during the sixteenth century, incapable of literary expression. To the majority of those who spoke it, it was only an acquired language artificially substituted for the mother-tongue.¹

Conclusion

(1) The nobles spoke French and that because of the advantages it secured.

“French continued to be exclusively used at Court and consequently in the higher administration. Therefore, as the action of the state and of the nobility grows more important, it becomes indispensable to learn it—either to conform to fashion or to succeed in life. And

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. iv., p. 326.

thus it happens that, notwithstanding isolated protests, it unceasingly gains ground.”¹

(2) Later on the new nobles followed suit :

“Titles, awards, favours of every kind were bestowed upon those noblemen who had instigated, or supported, the defection of the Walloon provinces and, during the following years, the state did not cease to promote new families to the rank of the higher nobility. From 1602 to 1638 there are counted not less than 41 cases of domains becoming counties, marquisesates, principalities ; and about 1640 people complain that more nobles now are made in one year than was formerly usual in a century.”²

Professor Pirenne does not seem very respectful :

“Albert and Isabella lived as strangers among their subjects. . . . Later on, the Spanish governors were nothing but generals encamped in the midst of our provinces and without the least connection with them.

“Perpetually absent, the king only revealed his far-away existence by *mercédès*, pensions and titles of nobility, which, by stimulating the taste for money or distinctions, kept up the loyalism of the aristocracy and the devotion of the officials.”³

¹ H. Pirenne. *Histoire de Belgique*, vol. iv., p. 326.

² *Ibid.*, p. 441.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

The evil social consequences of this situation could not fail to make their appearance. The linguistic separation between the Court, the nobles and the Flemish people has undoubtedly contributed to the discontent of the last.

The sole facts which are adduced to prove the bilingualism of Flanders in former centuries are taken from official life. He who knows what is happening in Flanders in our own time will grant readily that official life does not correspond with actual circumstances.

In the Belgian army everything to-day is French—exclusively French—not only the administration but all relations with the soldiers. At Honfleur, where I resided for a time, a doctor who does not know Netherlandish had to instruct the soldiers about the dangers of infectious diseases. Ninety-five per cent. of the soldiers were Flemings who did not understand French. The doctor's lesson was translated into Netherlandish by a soldier, as well as he could possibly do it. Suppose now the possibility, in a hundred years, of a successor to Pirenne. All the official army documents being French, that man will conclude that, since in the year of our Lord 1917, lessons were given in French, our soldiers knew two languages, and that Flanders was bilingual.

And this with greater appearance of truth ; as

everywhere else—at the front, in the ministry, in the camps, in the hospitals—the same circumstances prevail. And yet we shall prove later on that the great majority of the Belgian people does not know French; and that in normal times 60 per cent. of our soldiers know nothing but Netherlandish. We may add that at the present moment, by a concourse of circumstances due to the war, 85 per cent. of our soldiers are Flemings.

To try to prove the bilingualism of Flanders in the past by means of official documents is the less acceptable inasmuch as Flanders never was its own master, and for centuries lived under foreign kings and emperors, who sent foreigners as their delegates. It is quite true that these foreigners often spoke French, but they did not belong to the nation, any more than the Germans who now occupy Belgium and there use German as the official tongue. Will the successor of Professor Pirenne, coming five centuries later, conclude that Brussel was polyglot because official acts of 1916 or 1918 were published there in German also?

It is certainly probable that many nobles and wealthy people, descendants of the nobles of the Burgundian period, became French in their sympathies, but Professor Pirenne has not

130 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

yet brought us the proofs that this was so with the whole of the nobility.

Dr D. A. Stracke, S.J., advises us rightly to adopt the opposite point of view, and say Flanders was not bilingual. Adduce as proofs the facts recognised by them (*fransquillions*) to be difficulties. Add to these a few more, or rather many more, which they omitted to mention or did not know. Examine their difficulties, you will remove them easily and many things will appear in a new light.

The Flemish people was Flemish !

CHAPTER IV

FROM AUSTRIA TO FRANCE AND HOLLAND

THE Southern Netherlands came, very much mutilated, under the sway of Austria, and King Charles VI., by an international agreement, bound them for good to the crown of his successors.

The Powers ceded them willingly to Austria, so as to prevent their being occupied by France. They became little more than a garrison for foreign troops (Austrian, and also—but in lesser numbers—Dutch) whom the inhabitants of the Southern Netherlands had to provide for at their own expense.

Antwerpen, once the “pick of towns,” as Justus Lipsius expressed himself, was then only a small city of from 35,000 to 45,000 inhabitants, and 12,000 of these had to be supported by public assistance.¹ For the Schelde, the source of its prosperity, remained closed. Overseas trade was denied to it. When Charles VI. desired to restore the overseas trade by means of a navigation company, the “Ostend Company,” he was prevented by the allied states of Holland, England and France.

¹ *Cambridge Modern History*, vol. vi., p. 642.

132 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

Maria Theresa, who succeeded her father, Charles VI., tried to remove the foreign garrisons by forgetting to pay them; her efforts were in vain.

Her son, Joseph II., went further. He availed himself of international difficulties to abolish foreign occupation. He made also a vain attempt at opening the Schelde for trade by sending an armed ship down the river.

The policy of Austria was, even in the Southern Netherlands, wholly Austrian, and not a Belgian policy; it was a centralising and imperialistic policy. Yet Maria Theresa took much interest in her Southern Netherlandish states. Her son did not care so much for them; he was an enigmatic personality; a liberal-conservative; a doctrinaire of the original kind. He strove to lessen the influence of the great, even to destroy it.

Following the teaching of Febronius, he wished to nationalise religion. He meddled in the smallest ecclesiastical matters. In order to centralise the administration he abrogated the "Joyous Entry" and the charters of the communes. Yet the Austrian policy with respect to languages was not the same everywhere. Whereas in Hungary the Habsburgs pursued a Germanising policy, in Belgium the administration was French. It is true that

French at that period enjoyed a world-influence among the upper classes. In 1785 the French writer Rivarol was crowned by the Academy of Berlin for a work on the universality of the French language. Rousseau, Voltaire and others were known throughout the world. At the German courts French was the predominating language of diplomacy. There is no reason to be astonished when we see that in Belgium also the central administration was French in spirit. Professor Kurth tells us that even the relations between the central government and the communes were carried on in French.¹

From the time of Charles VI. Netherlandish letters addressed to the communes are the exception, and with Maria Theresa they disappear for the rest of the century.

Pycke nevertheless maintains that in Flanders the officials had to be Flemings.² It is asserted that the Great Council of Mechelen was French, but it was not elected by the people. The cry of alarm raised by the Brussel barrister Verlooy seems to indicate that French influences were then for the first time beginning to grow in his town, though in a very limited way.

¹ Professor Kurth. *Frontière Linguistique.*

² *Mémoire sur l'état de la législation et des tribunaux avant la Révolution Française.*

“ There are some who avoid speaking Netherlandish in society or in the street ; and others who purposely speak it badly that they seem to have been educated in France, whom you will hear in inns and cafés obstinately stammering French, without even turning to Flemish for help in their trouble.”¹

Once more the Flemish people saw its rights denied it, once more it revolted.

Will the rulers of Flanders never remember the lesson taught them by history ? But that revolt never was, as in France, a popular outburst. As genuine “ Real-politikers,” the Flemings bided their time, conscious of their own powerlessness ; so they availed themselves of the opportunity offered by their rulers being in difficult straits, to revolt and to claim their rights. We saw this in the time of Mary of Burgundy, and again in that of the Emperor Charles ; and so once again Austria was at variance with Turkey and Prussia ; the Flemings took up arms and beat the Imperial troops at Gent and in the Kempen. Deputies assembled at Brussel in January, 1790, and proclaimed the Belgian Republic. Joseph II. sent Trautmannsdorf and Philip Cobenzl to repeal his former decrees and recognise the ancient liberties. It was too late.

¹ *Ons Vaderland*, 8th December 1917.

Leopold II. succeeded his brother in 1791. As soon as matters had been settled with Turkey he sent an Austrian army to Belgium. The Republic fell. Leopold's reign lasted but two years, not long enough to make good the injustice done by Joseph.

That the French were hailed with gladness by some Belgians need astonish no one. During the Austrian domination there had been a group of revolutionists led by Vonck. Others looked upon revolution as deliverance from the foreign yoke. Their joy, however, did not last long. The French occupation became still more odious than the Austrian.

Napoleon would bring order into it later on. Many excellent innovations were made. Notwithstanding opposition from England, which took its stand on treaties, Napoleon declared the Schelde to be free. He maintained that a free country like France could not uphold a mediæval situation created by treaties. Nature did not suffer waters to be dammed in their course. After the French occupation it entered no man's mind to declare the Schelde closed because it had been opened by the conqueror. Canals and roads were constructed, but France took from us that which we held most dear, our freedom, our independence. The very

136 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

names of our provinces were altered; the country was cut up into seven departments over which French *préfets* were set.

“The Netherlandish language was excluded from all administrative matters, either local or provincial. For some time publication of the Acts of the local administrations was still allowed in both languages.”¹

By a law of 3rd June 1803 (14th of Prairial, anno XI.) the people were forbidden to use the national language. That prohibition was made still more stringent by Napoleon on the 22nd December 1812. All teaching had to be in French, and French schoolmasters were preferred. A teacher who, after a year, was not able to teach in French was discharged. All books had to pass through the hands of the censor, either at Paris or at Amsterdam. Each *département* was allowed the possession of but one political newspaper, and that had to be published in French, a Flemish translation on one side of the paper being permitted. All public deeds had to be written in French, or at least to be translated into French.

Flemish youths were incorporated in the French army and trained and led by French officers. The administration was carried out

¹ F. Passelocq. *La Question Flamande et l'Allemagne*. Berger Levrault. Paris. 1917.

wholly by French officers. The name and language of our people were ordered to disappear.

For twenty-two years Flanders had to bear the yoke. Once more an English army came and saved Flanders on Flemish soil.

Through the Treaty of Vienna, after Napoleon's fall, the Northern and Southern Netherlands, severed since the sixteenth century, were again united. Under a wise and prudent rule the country might have looked forward to a happy future, but the king and his councillors did not grasp the situation.

Netherlandish now obtained its full rights, but the language of the Walloons did not enjoy the liberty it could rightly claim. By decrees of the 8th June and 18th September 1814, Dutch was proclaimed the official language for public deeds. A decree of the 15th September 1819 ordained that from the 1st January 1823 onwards Dutch should be exclusively used for all public acts. Yet that decree was to be applied only to the Flemish part of Belgium and to the bilingual district of Brussel and Leuven; Walloons and Frenchified Flemings, whose parents or ancestors had disavowed their national character out of self-interest, raised protests.

One quotation may be allowed from a very

188 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

interesting pamphlet.¹ Its motto is : “ Quid, si vox libera non sit, liberum est ? ”

“ I have just heard,” writes a Walloon under the Dutch rule, “ somebody speaking about the advantages derived from the conformity of language among the several parts of a state, and I am willing to grant that these advantages are real, though I am far from believing them to be so important as some pretend.

“ But does it follow then that to secure these advantages one may entirely disregard all the laws of justice, all the feelings of humanity ? Indeed conformity in religion is also an undisputable advantage, even from a political point of view. But is there anyone who thinks *that* a sufficient reason for using violence against other men’s conscience, and for upsetting the altars of those who worship God in a fashion different from our own.

“ And is it before Your Majesty,² in the name of I know not what system of uniformity and equality, that people dare to utter such intolerant maxims ? Before Your Majesty who, although belonging to a church separated by its dogma from the Roman church, has always protected and continues to protect the Roman

¹ *Un Belge Esquisse historique sur les langues considérées dans leurs rapports avec la civilisation et la liberté des peuples.* 1817.

² The author speaks to the king.

religion. Levelling—no, complete uniformity—is this the sole happiness of the people? Slavery then is good, since all slaves are equal in their bonds. This uniformity, so bepraised by some so-called statesmen, is it not rather repulsive to Nature, which seems to find pleasure in a variety of forms, and sets upon races, as on individuals, distinctive marks which, through the influence of social laws, habits, customs and manners, give in the end a kind of speaking physiognomy to the character of nations that even time and political upheavals can with difficulty efface?

“A secret instinct seems to warn peoples that in bringing them a new language one brings them servitude also. And that instinct is so powerful that it has been sufficient, with some nations, to make them obstinately reject a language more civilised than their native idiom.

“Every government which, by open or hidden means, seeks to deprive a people of its own tongue, has the manifest intention of plunging it into the most complete political powerlessness.”

Such was the proud language of the Walloons under Dutch administration and, reading it now, one is full of respect for our Walloon people.

The king yielded. New decrees were issued—the first on 26th August 1829, ordaining that

140 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

notaries were to draw up wills and contracts of marriage in the tongue of the parties concerned, and conceding the use of the language of the accused or condemned before the penal tribunals, provided that it was understood by them, the witnesses and the judges. A decree of 4th June 1830 increased those concessions. But the concessions came too late.

Besides, the thing that to the French-speaking population was the greatest grievance was the fact that most of the public appointments were given to North Netherlanders.¹

In the army, *e.g.*, the situation was as follows :

	Dutchmen	Belgians
Generals-in-chief	4	0
Licutenants-general	16	4
Colonels of infantry	13	4
Colonels of artillery	6	0
Directors of engineers	4	0
	<hr/> 43	<hr/> 8

Other groups joined the French-speaking population. We may mention the churchmen, who complained of the king's interference in ecclesiastical matters — by the creation of the “Collegium Philosopicum,” for instance.

¹ Cf. Lytton Bulwer. *Life of Palmerston*. Bentley. London: 1870.

AUSTRIA TO FRANCE & HOLLAND 141

On 13th December 1830 the Bishop of Mechelen addressed a letter to Congress, in which he said :

“Complete freedom, with all its consequences, is our sole aim and desire, and its advantages we wish to share with all our fellow-countrymen.”

A third group strove after the annexation of Belgium by France. It received the support of official France.

Of Brussel the Rev. C. Edmundson, M.A., says :

“In no city of Europe at that time were so many political refugees from every nation to be found as in Brussels, and to such as these a revolutionary outbreak was as the breath of their nostrils.¹

The Southern Netherlands had at their disposal means to defend their rights ; they were represented in Parliament. But *Mr Henry Lytton Bulwer*, M.P., afterwards Earl Lytton, and formerly English envoy in Holland, sent expressly to Belgium by the Minister of Foreign Affairs to investigate the situation, observed rightly that it was difficult to remove by legal means the abuses which, he said, were foolish and tyrannical.

“It was only necessary for the Dutch to vote

¹ *Cambridge Modern History*, vol. x., p. 534.

together and three or four Belgians to vote with them, in order to legitimise the refusal of all Belgian requests.”¹

The revolution came. The Powers intervened and declared Belgium an independent state.

Conclusion—(Has Flanders been Bilingual?)

We conclude once more with the eminently calm words of Dr Stracke, S.J.: “Professor Pirenne did not speak the last word. From our side nearly nothing has been said. But what has been said suffices for requesting an answer to questions which require one, an explanation of facts which stand firm. Flanders only wants truth—the full truth, however. A fight is being waged against unjust conditions, which, though they are a hundred years old and were formerly tolerated, remain unjust and oppressive. But before the legislating Parliament should confirm or create new unjust conditions, the country and the administration have to examine the truth of those historical assertions, which are taken as a basis for promulgating laws that are condemned by 4,000,000 Belgians as pernicious and unjust.”

If Flanders had been bilingual then the Flemish people would have died out long ago,

¹ Lytton, *loc. cit.*

according to the law quoted by the learned Professor Kurth :

“The wonder is that in such circumstances it is the people who knows two languages which will one day end by speaking its own no more,”¹ and accepted by Madison Grant :

“The Belgian upper classes are bilingual, a condition which precedes a change of language.”²

The life of Flanders has been, from the Middle Ages, a restless struggle for autonomy, for liberty and its own language. That a few rich people, moved by self-interest or the splendour of the conqueror, or tired in the fight, should succumb diminishes in no way its significance. If their descendants want, by the conservation of a foreign language, to bear in themselves the stigma of their inherited weakness, then such a course is open to them. But that their weakness should be turned against the Flemings in order to deny autonomy to the Flemish people is a thing which we will never endure.

We remember with piety the steadfast will of our forefathers, who defended their individuality, notwithstanding every conquest and oppression, and kept it intact. Let us preserve their proud tradition :

“The survival of oppressed minorities in

¹ Kurth. *La Frontière Linguistique*, p. 5.

² Leon Dominian. *Frontiers of Language*. Introduction. Constable. London. 1918.

144 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

the midst of oppressing majorities is 'the triumph of Right over Might.'"¹

"It is the victory of the human will. It has been purchased by dint of a hard struggle. Humanity is the better for it."²

¹ Leon Dominian. *Frontiers of Language*. Introduction. Constable. London. 1918.

² *Ibid.*

CHAPTER V

FLANDERS UNDER BELGIUM

Il est sur ce rivage une race flétrie
Une race étrangère au sein de sa patrie.

C. DELAVIGNE.

THE statesmen who took the reins in hand after 1830 gave proof of clear insight and sound policy. Great as were the difficulties they had to surmount, they brought the Belgian ship of state safely and triumphantly out of the quicksands. It is therefore almost unintelligible that they should have so fallen short of statesmanship as not to adapt the organisation of the state to the duality of the Belgian people.

The constitution proclaimed the liberty of languages, and use had only to be settled by law—this only “pour les actes de l'autorité publique et pour les affaires judiciaires.” This liberty, in fact, was for the Flemings what liberty is for the worker who is given freedom to be oppressed.

The ordained tongue of the administration was French, of justice French, of the army French, of education — once more — French! But the maid-servant in the kitchen might talk

146 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

Flemish ! The only official recognition was that jurymen could answer "yes" or "no" in French or Netherlandish to questions put to them.

Walloons were appointed as officials all over the country : Luxemburg supplied them.

To depict the situation we cannot do better than quote the following :—A member of Parliament proposed that a Chair of Netherlandish Literature should be founded in the University of Gent. The minister answered that this was not necessary, as the Flemings knew enough Netherlandish. After violent protests the Flemings obtained permission to found the Chair *at their own expense*. But French professors were invited to lecture at the universities —*e.g.* Huet at Gent, on philosophy, in 1840, and Sainte Beuve, in 1848, at Liège, on French literature.

France enjoys the honour of having been the first to recognise that higher education must be given in the language of the people if it is to benefit the people. When Latin was abandoned at Gent University it was replaced not by the language of the people but by French, and this was done by royal decree and not by law. Secondary education, too, was French.

Then primary education became French. Even to this day thousands of Flemish children

cannot find a school where they can be taught in their tongue, the only one they understand.

French officers were called in to organise the army.

And so nothing was left undone that everything should become systematically French. How was it possible for men who had brought about a revolution in order to be rid of the domination of a language to impose the same domination on the Flemish people? More, they knew the history of the Flemings and ought to have foreseen that a people which had struggled through centuries for its right was not going to give up that right under Belgian administration.

Was the problem too difficult for them? Were they sure that the Walloons would be against a policy of give-and-take? It is notorious that in a state ruling two peoples there must be compromises. An unmarried man has to care for himself alone. His life is less complete than that of a married man; nevertheless it is easier.

Are the Flemings accomplices to the situation? Not without some appearance of truth has it been said to the Flemings: You were and are in the majority in Belgium. If the conditions you are living in, and of which you are

148 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

complaining, do exist, then it is through your own fault !

Appearances are, in fact, against us, and therefore this argument must be examined closely.

Belgium started with a population of 3,785,814 inhabitants. The majority was, I think, Flemish : I have no official figures. But on 7th February 1846 Magherman stated in a speech in Parliament that in Belgium there were 4,337,196 inhabitants, 1,827,141 of whom spoke French or Walloon, and 2,471,248 Flemish. From this we are entitled to conclude that after 1830 the Flemish element was in the majority.

What appears still more to plead against us is the fact that honest Walloons rose to defend the rights of the Flemings. From this one might once more conclude, with an air of truth, that if the Flemings seemed to lean towards French traditions this happened because they asked for nothing better.

We should be ungrateful if we did not remember thankfully the Walloons who helped the Flemings with admirable firmness. Mr Stecker, e.g., wrote in *La Revue Trimestrielle*¹ an article on "The Flemish Revival, from a National and Philosophical Standpoint," where he appealed to the common-sense of the Belgians.

¹ Vol. ix., p. 5.

"It is very dangerous," he wrote, "to make a joke of the question of languages. It is serious. We have to take conditions as they are, and regulate our actions accordingly. One does not change nature with impunity.

"It is better to accept things as they were created, to learn from them, and to plan for the future.

"It is useless to accuse the Flemings of being marplots and of busily sowing sedition. History engendered the divisions complained of. Belgium respects justice too much to adopt a system of exclusion. Our customs, our habits, our interests, our institutions bid us leave a free course to every living energy and not be frightened by the free development of the constituent parts of our country. Let Flemings and Walloons, as one of our statesmen said, learn to know and consequently to appreciate each other better."

These are wise words from a wise man. To-day they are even more significant than fifty years ago.

More Walloon names might be mentioned. Even Conscience, who roused our national spirit, bears a French name, and was the son of a French sailor and a Flemish mother from Antwerpen.

To understand better how the Flemish people

150 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

allowed its rights to be trodden underfoot, we must picture to our mind the conditions in the year 1830. This may best be done by grouping these conditions under their natural headings—historical, political, religious and economic.

(1) *Historical*

The revolution was the work of three groups : the higher clergy, the French-speaking classes and the annexationists who wanted to join Belgium to France. The clergy received their reward. The third group could not triumph, thanks to the unbending will of Lord Palmerston, who, true to the centuries-old policy of England with regard to the Netherlands,¹ informed France in very clear terms that he would not shrink from a European war, were that necessary, to prevent the annexation of Belgium by France. The influence of this group was, however, very great in carrying through the French policy, for it associated it with those French-speaking Belgians who had felt hurt on the language question under the Dutch regime. Their policy was bound to be one of reaction ; they took the same line as the Dutch ! What was once branded a “ foolish and tyrannical *ordonnance* ” becomes now sensible and just !

¹ Montagu Burrows. *The History of the Foreign Policy of Great Britain*. Blackwood. London. 1897.

"There are in the world two sorts of peoples : oppressors and oppressed. A people that is not being oppressed becomes an oppressor as soon as it possesses the means to oppress. Such is the way of the world. The Austrians oppressed the Hungarians. The Hungarians received their liberty in the AUSGLEICH of the year 1867, and they oppressed the Slovaks, Yougo-Slavs, Ruthenes and Rumanians. The Poles were given more liberty in their own schools, etc.; they in turn oppressed the Ruthenes. The Walloons had been oppressed; it was now their turn for oppressing the Flemings. The following shows how vehement was the reaction :—

" Not a single member of Congress dared let his compatriots hear the language of their ancestors. No one could conceive of it. It would not have been safe ! He would have been scolded on the spot for an Orangist, and perhaps given a thrashing. What could the Flemings do ? Return to William or become Frenchmen ? . . . They kept silent and waited." ¹

We who are living in a time of turmoil can conceive best what tyranny over the mind means in war or revolution.

¹ H. Van Walgrave. *De Vlaming en de Staat in het Tegenwoordig België*. Lamot. Antwerpen. 1851.

(2) *State*

The Belgian revolution was, as we have said, the work of a few groups under the direction of a few leaders. The mass of the population did not join in. There were also some "intellectuals" who did not follow. A counter revolution was threatened, and was feared for a long time, and the best way to combat it, in the minds of the statesmen of the day, was to estrange the people from Holland by making them French in their sympathies. At the same time unity of language would be achieved. There would thus be *in fact* one official language, although the constitution, as I have said, proclaimed the liberty of languages. This was the theory of the first if not the most powerful of Belgian statesmen, Charles Rogier.

Rogier was said to have written to Lord Palmerston to the effect that endeavours had to be made to exterminate Netherlandish so as to prepare for annexation to France.

We do not guarantee the truth of the story, but it is true that Rogier worked to bring Belgium under the French royal authority. He was too clever not to know that if Belgium came under the same rule as France, Belgian autonomy would cease to exist.

In the seventeenth century the King of

Holland, in order to resist Catholic France, called the English to aid the Dutch crown. But through that fact Holland lost its greatness and the only reason it did not cease to exist was that the sea lay between it and England. Did not Spain, did not Austria, in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries use the Catholic Netherlands for their own purposes ?

Whatever may have been Rogier's intentions, there is no doubt that, especially during the first years after the revolution, he aimed at introducing French traditions so as to establish at least a friendly feeling towards France.

Charles Rogier was born of Belgian parents long domiciled in France. He wrote to his brother Firmin : "*I shall stand to the end for Nemours, because, no matter how French diplomacy may be in the wrong, France's policy must be ours.*"¹

This letter crossed one from his brother, in which he, "cursing the pusillanimity of the French ministry," returns to the previously fostered project of founding a federative republic, the president of which should be La Fayette, the greatest citizen of the world.²

¹ Charles Rogier, 1800-1855. D'Après des documents inédits par Ernest Discailles, prof. à l'Université de Gand. Lebègue. Bruxelles.

² Ernest Discailles. *Un Diplomate Belge à Paris de 1830-1864*. Van Oest. Bruxelles. 1909.

154 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

Belgian statesmen must have been taking counsel of the Romans : *Imperium et libertas*—liberty for me and subjection for you ; or they may have been reading Machiavelli's *Prince*.

From a letter of Rogier's to Lord Palmerston, mentioned by Discailles, it appears that Rogier considered unity of language a necessity for the state. He expressed the same opinion to the Minister of Justice, Raikem. Moreover, his actions, and those of the Belgian administration in general, show more clearly than words the intention of the Government. One knows a tree by its fruit.

In the name of the very principles against which he had brought about the revolution, and against which the Walloons had protested for so many years, Rogier meant to oppress the Flemings !

The thesis is simple : the moment it is necessary, for State reasons, that the people should be oppressed, then the people must be oppressed. If this be accepted, what becomes of man's vaunted faculty of organisation ?

But to pass a fair judgment on the statesmen of 1830 we must also take into account time and circumstances. Belgium was such a delicate plant ; it had still to show vitality. They had tended it with their own hands, and wanted it to grow and blossom, and so they

would avert everything that might prevent it from growing and blossoming. They saw danger in the bilingual system ; therefore it must disappear. They confused unity with unanimity, uniformity with union, union with order. Just as if order and harmony did not presuppose diversity ! Uniformity is the negation of order and harmony. To attain unity they would put the Flemings into the mould again and recast them !

(3) *Religious*

Flanders throughout the centuries under foreign domination owes the conservation of its language in great measure to its sense of religion. The Netherlandish tongue continued to live in the pulpits of the Church (I notice the same thing among the Boers, our racial brothers in South Africa). For this the Flemish clergy deserve our eternal thanks. But praise cannot be given without qualification ; we must except the prelates. Unimpeachable as their aims often were, certain measures adopted by them cannot be explained away. Holland was the Protestant country with which all relations must be severed. The revolution had been supported by them as a protest against certain measures taken by William. (Dread of Holland still survives here and there, although Holland

156 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

numbers, perhaps, as many good Catholics as Belgium.) In any case, the higher clergy, in agreement with non-believers, did declare war against Holland, and after the war all remaining bonds had to be severed entirely. The substitution of French was the best means.

All schools were to be French systematically. Flemish was still to be tolerated for the teaching of religion and as the colloquial tongue of the —rabble! Colloquial language! The higher clergy caused a wall to be raised between the upper—not necessarily better—classes and the *vulgum pecus*. Some of these prelates did not even speak the language of the people they had to instruct. The Holy Ghost descended on the apostles and bestowed on them the gift of tongues, that they might “go and instruct the people”; but the Holy Ghost ought now to descend on the people to give them the gift of languages “that they may go and be instructed!”

The Flemish folk followed its clergy. I have already shown the attitude of the higher clergy: it was anti-Dutch. The lower clergy continued to use the language of the people, but they were dependent on their superiors, and these founded schools which were French and Latin but not Flemish. Further, they were under the influence of French Catholics. They

studied De Maistre, Lamennais, Montalembert, etc. The Flemings, unhappily, never knew an archbishop like Monsignor Szeptichi of Lemberg, who stood by his Ruthenian people and let himself be imprisoned for them; or like Monsignor Strosmeier, who, as leader of the Croats, was to the end of his life a blessing to his people.

(4) *Social and Economic*

The foreign regime under which the Flemish people lay for centuries must not be forgotten—the French influences which, under France's domination, had doomed her people to ignorance.

The Dutch government found, on taking over Belgium, that the system of primary education for the people was in the most hopeless condition. Only one-third of the population was able to read or to write their names. Organised schools for the people there were none.¹

These conditions did not change much for the better during the union with Holland. The central administration left education to the communes, and there was no question of a general scheme. A few schools sprang up in the towns, but none in the country.

¹ *Das Schwarzbuch oder die enthüllte Propaganda Belgiens aus dem Französischen mit einleitenden Bemerkungen.* Cf. Dr G. F. H. Rheinwald. *H. Pieter*, p. xxxiii. Altenburg. 1838.

158 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

And, then, the Flemish people was poor. Belgium began with a population of 3,785,814 inhabitants, in very unfavourable circumstances. After the declaration of the freedom of the Schelde by Napoleon and the union with Holland, the country slowly revived, and then came revolution, once more interrupting national development.

It is undeniable, and no political prejudice can gainsay it, that the commercial and industrial prosperity enjoyed by Belgium at the beginning of 1830 sprang essentially from three causes: the possession of Java, the free navigation of the Rhine through the intermediary waterways of Holland and the community of interest with this last country.

In the possession of Java—thanks to the protecting tariffs established in this colony—Belgium found not only an immense outlet for its manufactured articles, but a valuable *asset* for its maritime expeditions, whose resources went to Germany by the Rhine; whilst Holland, deprived of mines, without important industries and without agriculture, bought from it the surplus of its mineral and agricultural produce.¹

But Flanders, more than Wallonia, had for a long time to come *sacrificed* its prosperity.

¹ E. Discailles. *Charles Rogier*. Lebègue. Bruxelles.

Walloon industry continued to find a market in Belgium and the neighbouring countries. The chief industries of Flanders were, for centuries, spinning and weaving, which found their principal markets in the Dutch colonies. But this trade passed to England, which had introduced machinery for spinning and weaving, causing for a long time disaster to the Flemish weaver. "In less than four years Belgium's export of linen fell by one half; and a large proportion of the 300,000 workmen whose existence was dependent on this industry was reduced to begging and starvation."¹ On the other hand, the port of Antwerpen was going to suffer grievously, and for Flemish agriculture the separation proved to be no advantage.

Two facts will give further proof of the poverty of Flanders: (1) the low standard of wages; (2) the slow growth of the population. The following table (see p. 160) gives a comparison between the standard of wages in Flanders and in Wallonia in 1846. The highly salaried industries are found in Wallonia, whilst those paying low salaries are Flemish.

From these figures it appears that the Flemish workpeople did not earn a franc a day, although that coin represented at the time a

¹ *Cambridge Modern History*, vol. xi., p. 670.

160 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

		Workers over 16 years of age are earning					
		1 fr. per day and under	1 to 2	2 to 3	3 to 4	4 to 5	More than 5
1. Industries Mineral (Wallonia)	Coal and coke .	1-539	17-067	15-942	1-189	98	12
	Metal industries	980	12-062	5-017	1-056	385	190
	{ Main works { Sec. works { Trade factories	1-716 4-925	1-521 6-987	575 1-508	123 131	35 27	14 5
2. Industries Manufactures (Flanders)	Quarries, slates and ceramics	2-347	11-156	2-528	242	57	37
	{ Main works { Trade factories	1-802	7-666	1-258	19	8	—
	Flax, hennep .	10-548	2-674	309	32	18	10
		18-761	3-394	194	15	6	17

much higher value than to-day. Further, Flemish industry began slowly to be transferred to Wallonia. The consequence was—in accordance with the theory of Adam Smith, that population increases during the periods of prosperity, when there is plenty of work—that the population of Flanders fell below that of Wallonia.

From 1831 to 1840 it increased in the provinces of—

Oost Vlaanderen with 4·91 per cent.

Antwerpen	„	6·06	„
Limburg	„	6·17	„
West Vlaanderen	„	6·22	„
Hainaut	„	7·91	„
Luxemburg	„	8·68	„
Liège	„	9·37	„
Brabant	„	10·54	„
Namur	„	11·75	„

This slow growth of the population was very probably due to emigration and not to a low birth-rate.

“It is necessary,” said Rogier, “that the Flemings should seek the Walloon country, where they will find a living. If Flemish women and girls knew the language spoken in the other parts of the country, there would be a greater demand for them as maid-servants, because of their reputed sense of order and cleanliness.”

162 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

Poor Flanders ! All that was left to our girls to do was to learn French and then hire themselves as domestics in Wallonia. Such a thing is not asked from Indian coolies !

Then, to increase the general misery, came the potato famine of 1845 and the failure of the harvest of 1847.

To provide employment for the starving workpeople new roads were built by the state and the Turnhout Canal was constructed. Flanders was employed for a crust of bread ! Does a beggar speak of rights, rights of language, rights of education and culture ? I was told lately by a barrister, who had just escaped from Belgium, how things are going there. He spoke of one of my friends, a highly cultured man, and said : “You know him well : when one meets him he says, like everybody else : ‘What shall we find to eat to-night ?’”

Flanders, after the year thirty, was as poor as Belgium to-day.

(5) *Political*

The Flemish people had no voice in the government.

The nobles and the rich formed the body politic ; Walloons and families which had become French had the monopoly of riches, parliaments, law and schools. They were—

espécially during the first years of Belgium's existence—the upper ten; the *populus* as differentiated from the *misera contribuens plebs*—the tax-paying people. Belgium was, in fact, an oligarchy. It was no organised nation. From a Flemish standpoint, this Belgium of the past must be considered as belonging to a period outside our national development.

The National Congress, called together by the Provisional Government, was elected by the industrial and wealthy classes. The people, even if they had wished to, could not exert the least influence. This same congress enacted that the right to vote should be confined to those who paid direct taxes, and these taxes were not to be higher than a hundred and not lower than twenty florins. This system was, we venture to think, copied from England, where it disappeared in 1867 after the death of Palmerston.

Only a few Flemings paid a contribution of this importance. In the district of Turnhout there were, in 1833, 86,564 inhabitants: of these 699 enjoyed the franchise! Franchise? The voting papers were distributed and filled in in advance. One man lorded it over the whole district. On the demand of this gentleman, Count de Mérode, Turnhout was represented by

164 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

Charles Rogier, the man who was to attempt the extirpation of Flemish, although he had been shown the door in his own district of Liège by the "*Parti de France*."

Worse still, in 1837 Rogier was elected in the Flemish town of Antwerpen, through the influence of a few wealthy business men, who exchanged their Flemish soul for a threepenny bit. "The territorial oligarchy had by then thoroughly fused with the commercial magnates, and the fusion had produced plutocracy,"¹ wrote Cardinal Bourne, of England. How much more true are these words of Flanders. The people counted for nothing in all this. There were in Antwerpen, in 1850, 77,162, and in the district 166,313 inhabitants. Only 1182 voted after the manner of Turnhout. But this figure had been doubled in 1848, so that there were from 500 to 600 votes in the district. The Flemish electors were thus being pushed to the voting box, just as the Irish Catholics were pushed by the Protestant landlords in the time of O'Connell (1825-1830). Members of Parliament were appointed, not elected. In palliation of the conduct of the business men of Antwerpen one may say that Rogier had rendered two important services to the commerce of

¹ Cardinal Bourne. *The Nation's Crisis*. Cath. Soc. Guild, London.

Antwerpen. After the separation from Holland a few hot-heads wanted to tax Dutch shipping as a retaliatory measure. Rogier averted that danger. Further, he was the initiator of the railway from Antwerpen to Germany.

That Flemish districts were represented by Walloons is nothing extraordinary. Quite the contrary! As a consequence of the past, Flemings having had nothing to do with matters politic all through our history, Walloons were systematically foisted on the electors by the plutocracy. I wonder if a Fleming has ever represented a Walloon district. In 1847 Dumortier loses his seat in Tournai. In June, 1848, he is elected for Rousselare.

What angers us to-day is that one-third of the members of Parliament were officials. A few were more French than Belgian. One amongst them went so far as to propose the demolition of the Lion of Waterloo! There was nothing astonishing in the fact. The Flemings were at a loss to find representatives in many districts. One had to be rich to accept a seat; he had to give up his business and reside in Brussel. And there were no railways. This explains why people coming from no one knows where succeeded in capturing a seat in Flemish districts. A few were sent by our select Catholic districts, even when from a Catholic

166 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

standpoint they offered no guarantees whatever. In some districts the seat in Parliament practically became hereditary. Thus early was the Flemish people not represented in Parliament.

But this does not excuse the parliamentarian who represented Flanders. Has a parliament to wait for a revolution before doing justice to those entitled to it? Has a parliament to lead or must it be led? To put the question is to answer it. Most revolutions have come about because statesmen have not possessed enough sense of polity spontaneously to face their problems and to solve them. To wait till the people no longer demands, but exacts, a solution is to make revolution unavoidable.

(6) *Party*

The direction of politics began shortly after 1831, and continued till the very eve of the war, excluding a strong political Flemish action.

The Dutch danger out of the way, Belgium had been declared independent, when there began political quarrels, which had their repercussion in Parliament.

“The Catholic and Liberal parties seemed to want to know their strength the very first day, on the occasion of the election of the president of the Congress.”¹

¹ *Charles Rogier. Op. cit.*

The first quarrel—concerning the emoluments of the clergy—arose between the two parties at the opening of the session of 1836. The split already existed in their minds when, in 1839, Devaux wrote in a periodical that a parliamentary system was unworkable without parties.

The masonic lodges built their own schools. A Bill to grant a civil constitution to the centuries-old university of Leuven was subjected to such heavy opposition that it had to be dropped. In 1840 de Theux's ministry was replaced by a Liberal ministry, under Lebeau. During the years 1840 and 1841 the lodges planned the union of the Liberal deputies for Brussel into a league. Lebeau's ministry was then replaced by a coalition government, under the presidency of Nothomb. In 1845 Van de Weyer took the reins. In March, 1846, the Coalition Government had to go. Rogier, the Liberal leader, demanded the dissolution of the Chamber, but the king refused and entrusted de Theux with the formation of a Catholic ministry. The Liberal Union was called together in Brussel at the Town Hall and 320 Liberal deputies from the whole country assembled.¹

England had the same political organisation. Introduced from America by Mr Chamberlain in 1880, it is called the "Caucus." Not wholly

¹ *Cambridge Modern History*, vol. xii., p. 671.

without reason did the Belgian unionists and, later, English politicians maintain that the "Caucus" falsifies the expression of the will of the people.

In 1847 the "Caucus" caused the fall of the ministry, as later on it caused the fall of Disraeli's ministry. The system, once it had been introduced, continued to influence our politics, just as it did in England.

The political field of battle had been chosen in Belgium and it was no more to be deserted by the parties. The Liberals, following the example of their French brothers in opinion, were Liberal in name only, forsaking Liberalism to devote themselves more and more to an anti-religious policy. The school war began on 4th February 1850, with the introduction by Rogier of a law affecting education.

The moral unity of Belgium was broken. The Liberals sowed more quarrels and disunion than the Flemish Movement ever did.

"Deprive Belgium of her attachment to Catholicism and tell me what distinguishes the Flemish provinces of our neighbours in the north from the Walloon provinces of our neighbours in the south,"¹ wrote Thomas Wilson with some little exaggeration.

¹ Th. Wilson. *English Foreign Policy*. Effingham Wilson. London.

At all events the struggle became so fierce that it dominated everything. England, too, knew a struggle for education, for in 1839 Lord John Russell founded a school committee, but never was the struggle so fierce as in Belgium, where the interests of the Flemish people remained secondary to the religious disputes.

As long as political strife affected only a few rich citizens, it was of little import to the Flemish Movement. But this could not last for ever. In 1848 the first extension of the franchise was introduced. The number of voters was increased by one half in the towns and by one-third in the country.

This uneven increase was again to the detriment of the Flemings, for the essentially Flemish rural population was put to disadvantage by it. In the towns the French anti-religious policy began to penetrate and Flemish rights were being sacrificed to it. Never did the Liberal party remain true to its principles when the rights of the Flemings were in question. Even during the war a Liberal minister of state has written a book to defend the rights of the Austrian nationalities (which have far more liberties than the Flemings). For the Flemings he does not speak one word.¹

¹ Goblet d'Alviella. *Le Vrai et le Faux Pacifisme*. Alcan. Paris.

170 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

The influence of France was so intense in 1848, the year of the French Revolution, that Rogier had to take stern measures against French intruders and their adherents.

A few Belgians had even agreed to proclaim Belgium a republic. The authorities of Lille had placed arms at the disposition of a few bands who were to invade Belgium. This raid is disavowed by the French Government.

The extension of the franchise was thus of no advantage to the Flemings. They had twice given up their union with Holland for religious reasons. In Belgium, too, they had to make their Flemish interests secondary to the fight against anti-clericalism.

A similar situation, which is never quoted by our opponents, occurred in Alsace-Lorraine. A nationalist *bloc* was formed. It was defeated, because religious and even economic advantages took precedence. Do the French or the Powers conclude, therefore, that Alsace-Lorraine does not want to become French?

How little Parliament represented the people is shown more clearly by the elections of 1848, when eighty-five Liberals and twenty-three Catholics were returned. He who knows how our people felt knows also that our people were not Liberal at all, but Catholic to their very finger-tips!

(7) *Psychological*

By the road of legality there was for our people no issue. In fact, all through history we are able to detect only one instance where a people has succeeded in capturing its right to existence by legal means—that people is the Norwegian. A threat of war was sufficient.

“*We know*,” said Mr Bonar Law on Lord Mayor’s Day, 1917—“*we know that no nation kept or obtained its liberty when it was not prepared to fight for it.*”

By revolutionary means alone was there a way to salvation. But does a people living in circumstances such as are described above—a people exhausted by centuries of subjugation, poor, Catholic—does such a people make a revolution? Especially when the people is essentially agricultural and inhabits Flanders?

“*The people can seldom agree to move together against a government but they can sit still to see it undone.*”¹

A population of peasants having to wage a daily fight against nature becomes long-suffering and fatalistic and, day by day, more resigned to its fate. It is notorious that where an agricultural population lives beside an

¹ Halifax. H. W. V. Temperley. “The Revolution in Great Britain.” *Cambridge Modern History*.

172 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

industrial population, the latter always gets the upper hand.

We observe the same thing in South Africa. The farmers have to bow to the industrialists. When the mines were discovered in South Africa General Cronje exclaimed: "Now is the end of the Boers!" What a prophecy!

The weakness of Poland lay in the fact that trade was in the hands of Germans and Jews. Against them stood the Polish peasants. In Sillesia the capitalists and industry are German. The workers are Poles.

When the farmer—as is the case with the Flemish peasant—had to wrest the land from the sea and fertilise the sand by the sweat of his brow, when from generation to generation he has to struggle against an adverse climate, it is not to be wondered at that passivity becomes second nature to him, that he lacks impulse, the spontaneity, the alertness required in a revolutionary.

That the low degree of vivacity in the Fleming should be solely due to climatic conditions I dare not assert. The fact cannot be denied. A Walloon would not endure for twenty-four hours—and this speaks to his advantage—the conditions imposed on the Flemings. Is the Fleming by nature long-suffering? I feel inclined to believe it.

Mr Van der Velde once pointed out how different the Flemish socialists are from their Walloon brothers. The Flemings have an organising mind ; the Walloons are revolutionaries !¹

To this must be added the fact that the peasant comes less into contact with the world of officials, except to pay taxes, and then the state takes care to get the business of collection done in Netherlandish. This is the one instance where the rights of the Flemings are recognised !

To show how this seclusion was partly at the bottom of the indifference to, and the ignorance of, the shameful Flemish conditions, the following may be noted. Our more educated farmers were not compelled to serve in the army, and therefore they did not experience the French tyranny of the army ; they kept silent. To-day they have to serve and their protests soon rang out.

A few wealthy people were left in Flanders. They let things drift. They were too feeble to react, or too French in spirit to feel the humiliation. They had been demoralised by the influence of wealth, as those who own much usually are, but in a larger proportion than in other countries, where at least a few rich have always fought for the nationalists.

¹ *Der Sozialismus in Belgien. Sozialistische Monatshefte, 1906.*

Conclusion

What then was the position of "popular culture" at the birth of Belgium? An ignorant Flemish people and a better educated Walloon people, which had been greatly favoured under the French regime, dwelt side by side.

A Walloon people which had learnt to fight for its language! Many very interesting pamphlets of that time are extant, and we Flemings, on the *tu quoque* principle, ought to use them against the intractables among the Walloons.

To blame the Flemish people for these conditions is base. Can we say to the workers, to the poor: "Why do you complain because you are not rich? It is your own fault, you are the majority in your country."

Every people has a right to life. This right is not dependent on might; and, supposing the Flemish people to have been too weak to exact its right, are the statesmen who did not recognise that right to be excused?

CHAPTER VI

THE FLEMISH DEFENCE

(a) *Revival of the Flemish Movement*

IN the year 30 the Flemish people was Flemish in its being, in its thoughts, in its feelings ; it was Flemish all through, but it was poor and defenceless. Powerful impulses slumbered in the mass of the people. They were waiting for the first ray of light, which was surely coming one day.

After centuries of domination, slowly the first signs of life showed themselves, not with great vigour and violence, but rather timidly, in pamphlets and newspapers, in poems and prose. It was the eve of a new day when, in 1839, Conscience's book, *The Lion of Flanders*, appeared, telling the story of the Battle of the Golden Spurs.

Life is action and reaction. The Flemings began to react against the exaggerated action of the French element. They resented their treatment. There could now be applied to them what a Walloon author wrote under the Dutch administration :

176 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

“Imagine therefore the despair of a people being robbed by violence or cunning of the use of its idioms! Anyone belonging to this proscribed nation is as unhappy as if the organ of speech had been taken from him. He has to rely on an interpreter for transacting the most important business; and when he dictates his last will, he does not know if the official who writes the deed will have thoroughly understood the meaning of the words spoken by his dying lips!

“Even the laws which he wants to obey seem to insult him when they speak to him. If he invokes them in his maternal language, they are deaf to his voice. Any kind of capacity or knowledge he may have acquired is lost to him. If he tries to speak the language of his masters, he evokes by this vain effort only signs of derision and disdain. He is compelled to keep silent before those whom the expression of his thought would have reduced to silence. He finds himself carried, as if by enchantment, into a foreign country where everything is unknown to him.”¹

“*Quantum mutatus ab illo.*” Positions have changed since that time.

The contest was going to begin, the Flemish Movement was born.

¹ *Esquisse Historique sur les Langues.* Loc. cit.

The Frenchifying party were complaining because the French tradition does not take root firmly enough. Mr Baron considers French influence as the *sine qua non* of Belgium's existence. "Our authors only write a French Flemish! They think in Flemish and when writing in French they keep the ideas, the forms, the expressions to which they are accustomed. They never succeed in permeating themselves with the genius of the French language."¹ This happened in 1844, after fourteen years of French propaganda.

Ten years after, in 1855, circumstances had not changed, as appears from an article by Mr Loise, a Doctor in Philosophy and Letters. He, too, complained bitterly of Belgians knowing such poor French. "What is the use of this language, if they do not know the secret power of it?"² He further thinks that the Belgians will only become unanimous in the day when French culture *shining through its language* will have penetrated into all classes of society. He nevertheless insists on declaring that he is a Belgian. A Belgian with a foreign soul!

In 1849 the Flemish people sent an address

¹ *Coup d'Œil sur l'État des Sciences et des Arts en Belgique depuis 1830-1844.*

² "Nécessité d'introduire l'Explication des Classiques Français dans les Examens préparatoires aux Grades Scientifiques," *Moniteur de l'Enseignement*, 30th November 1855, p. 197.

to the Chamber of Deputies. There we read :
 "With regard to the full possession and the full enjoyment of our civil and political rights, the Flemish provinces are in a more unfavourable position than under the Spanish or Austrian domination. More than two millions of our people live as foreigners in their own country. Our constitution is only a reality for the minority of the population."¹

In the same year, and after repeated efforts, the study of Netherlandish was made compulsory in secondary school competitive examinations, in the commercial and industrial sections. On this occasion Monsignor de Haerne proposed, on 11th April, an amendment in Parliament, aiming at the encouragement of the study of Netherlandish, by imposing knowledge of it on the Walloons, who went in for a higher education. The Chamber refused to sanction the amendment.

Petitions from Flemish people continued to pour in. In 1854 the whole question came again before Parliament.² Delehayé complains that there was no Chair of Netherlandish Literature in the University of Gent. The Government refused to appoint a professor, although by the law of 15th July 1849 this

¹ We translate from the Flemish.

² *De Vlaamsche Zaak voor de Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers in 1854.* Gent.

was made compulsory. Delehaye complained that the use of his language is denied to the Fleming even for the sending of telegrams, while foreigners, Englishmen or Germans, can use their own tongue.

The minister answered the first complaint by saying that the chair was not required, as Netherlandish was sufficiently known in Gent. Mr De Decker protested against the assertion that in all grades of education the interests of the Flemish language were being sacrificed.

In the agricultural schools French was used, and these institutions were thus rendered inaccessible to Flemings. He complains, too, that in the Flemish country the Netherlandish language is being taught as a foreign language in the secondary schools, and this in defiance of law. He protests also against the course of Flemish being eliminated from public competitions.

Under this criticism the minister conceded this much—that in the University of Gent a Chair of Netherlandish might be established by an amateur on the condition that the state should be put to no expense. According to Article III. of the law on higher education, Oriental, Greek and Latin literatures must be studied. Flemish or Dutch literature, the literature of the majority of Belgians, must be

180 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

optional, but if taught such teaching would have no state aid.

This was going too far, and the minister had to give way. The Flemish people had the promise that a Chair of Netherlandish Literature would be established. It was little, but the fortress of French had been breached.

The movement had its roots in those deepest and most generous feelings of the heart which elevate character and prepare it for the greatest sacrifices. The Flemings know what they want; and they know to-day what they will want to-morrow. It is no demagogic, destructive movement, but a real democratic movement, aiming at the uplifting to a higher moral and material level of 4,000,000 Flemings living in subjection.

Thus it is a cultural and social movement. It is social because it rests on the principle that the intellectual class has the duty towards the people of communicating to it its own culture.

The common language is the living *membrane*, through which this communication has to take place. When this language is replaced by a foreign one, then the *membrane* is unnatural and impenetrable.

The movement is completely in harmony with Christian principles as they have been

taught to us—viz. that man has received his various capacities in order to be able to help the people to share in his higher culture. The movement was from the beginning coldly received; then, as its power increased, it had the good luck, like every noble movement, to be insulted, attacked and persecuted. All true greatness is born in pain.

(b) *Flemish Art*

While the French tradition has wrought much havoc in Flanders, it has nevertheless brought about many good things; it gave us this splendid Flemish Movement. How many young men owe the awakening of their souls to it?

“Never were science, literature and art more active among the Greeks, never surer of immortality, than when Rome was conqueror. It was then that Greece produced Plutarch, Pausanias, Ptolemeus and Gallien; it was then it struck medals in its own language, engraving everywhere; it was then it built palaces and temples, educated its victors and extorted recognition of Greek supremacy in every branch of literature and knowledge. It is possible that the failure to destroy the Greek language, so that Latin should reign in its stead, was quite as much owing to the respect paid by the

182 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

Romans to the Greeks, as admiration for their qualities.”¹

True the Flemings have not got so far yet, but who dares to say they shall not—if their opponents are so kind as to continue oppressing them? Did they not give us Conscience, who at eighteen, moved by the enslaved condition of the Flemish people, cried out: “If I ever feel in my soul an impulse for writing, I will write in Netherlandish.”² This man taught our people to read.

Many names might be quoted, but we do not pretend to write the history of Flemish literature. Like the nationalist movements in the Balkans, in Bohemia, in Croatia, in Serbia, so in Flanders—the splendid Flemish Movement is awake to the prose of its writers and the songs of its poets.

We greet you, you who have roused our people; we greet you, Snieders, Sleeckx, Th. van Rijswijck, Van Beers, Jan van Droogenbroesk, F. de Cort, Willems, Ledeganck, Vuylsteke, David! It was under your impulse and your songs that Flanders awoke and that the Flemings have shaken off sleep!

¹ Duclos, *Mémoire sur les Langues Celtiques et Française.*

² Dr J. Persijn, *A Glance at the Soul of the Low Countries.* Washbourne, London, 1916.

(c) *Flemish Political Movement*

On the introduction of a military law, in 1802, which delayed the development of the port of Antwerpen by the erection of fortresses and a fortified ring, Catholics and Liberals joined hands to found a coalition which adopted the rights of the Flemings as an article in its programme. In 1862 they began their attack against Devaux, who was defeated. From that time the Flemings have made their voice heard in Parliament. The deputies for Antwerpen were not tied, like other members of Parliament, to a Catholic or anti-Catholic programme. The coalition or "Meeting Party" till the eve of the war kept much of its liberty of action.

A special circumstance offered itself in 1865. Two Flemings, Coucke and Goethals, accused of murder, were tried, condemned and executed. They protested their innocence most emphatically, but they were *not understood by the Court*. A few months afterwards the real culprits confessed their guilt. It speaks volumes that we are still waiting for the "restitution of their honour." This gave the Flemings a start.

Shortly after, in 1867, a change in the franchise law was proposed. For the first time universal suffrage was talked of. In 1870

184 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

the Ministry D'Anethan-Malou raised the rate to ten francs for the province.

This extension was bound to be to the advantage of the Flemings. Like every nationalist movement, the Flemish Movement is democratic; nationalism, popular education and popular liberty go everywhere hand in hand. History proves this. Revision of the constitution, aiming at an extension of the franchise, helped the Flemings a little on the way to the restitution of their rights. In 1870 (2nd August) there were 107,099 entitled to the franchise. In 1892 (14th July) 114,236 out of 136,775 electors cast a vote.

The Flemish question remained equally subordinate to the Catholic and anti-Catholic principle policy. But more and more Catholic and Liberal candidates were made to consider Flemish requirements as of secondary importance. Here and there a candidate who was known to have anti-Flemish sympathies was shown the door, and thus the Flemings got a little satisfaction.

In 1873 the Coremans law was voted, permitting the use of Netherlandish in criminal matters in the Flemish part of the country. In 1878 a few measures were taken concerning the use of Netherlandish in administrative matters. By a law of 1883 secondary schools were ordered

to provide two courses in Netherlandish. In 1886 an academy of the Netherlandish language and literature was founded. In 1889 the law of 1873 was amended. In 1890 a knowledge of Netherlandish was made obligatory for officials in Flanders; since 1898 the texts of all laws must be published in both languages. In 1913 Netherlandish became a compulsory subject in the military school. A law of 1914 enacted that from 1917 primary education has to be given in the mother-tongue. By the law of 1918, two secondary subjects must be taught in Netherlandish.

These few laws, still insufficiently obeyed, were only arrived at after years of struggle and through pressure of public opinion, as expressed through an extended franchise.

Here we are compelled to return to the objection, so often raised, that the Flemings, being in the majority, are themselves responsible for their position. We have already given an answer as regards the past. But the past is gone. Flanders is no longer poor, and the franchise is nearly universal. In 1894 there were 1,354,891 voters on the register. Why did the people not make its power felt by legal means? We answer:

(1) Parliamentary procedure is best, but to conclude that it is alone sufficient to solve

all important problems of state is sheer exaggeration.

A perfect electoral system, giving effect to the principle that an election is the expression of the conscious will of the people, has not been found yet, and will be very difficult to find. It has to be assumed that the electors are educated and conscious people, and that all deputies attend carefully to the will of the people—two conditions not to be realised. The body of electors will never be so cultured, and there will always be deputies to take von Bethmann Hollweg for model—without his sincerity—and tear up their programme without shame. And electors will always be under the influence of the politicians' paid Press.

Therefore as the body of electors is not wholly conscious and educated, the deputy has something else to do than to listen to the fluctuating will of the electors: he must be a leader; he must have some authority. With the party system—a consequence of the parliamentary system—the lead in politics centres in the hands of a few. The others are the "crowd." If the leaders deserve the name of "statesmen" there is hope that parliamentary action may solve problems of state, otherwise not.

(2) But when we consider the parliamentary system in Belgium, we see many reasons why

Parliament cannot be the expression of a conscious people's will:

(a) The low degree of education of our Flemish people. The proofs are given elsewhere.

(b) The Press has consequently a very great influence. Generally speaking, it stands at a level which no country in the world would envy.

(c) Our electoral system is contrived in such fashion that as little freedom as possible is left to the elector. He is compelled to vote for the complete list of candidates, even when beside the name of a Flemish candidate figures that of one with French sympathies. The candidates are nominated, not elected. The elector is compelled, in fact, to vote for a Catholic, a Liberal, or a socialist *policy*. This system, however, is approved by many; Catholic and anti-Catholic politics are so ingrained that a flamingant Liberal prefers to vote for a Liberal who detests Netherlandish rather than for a Flemish papist (!), and *vice versa*. Many Flemish electors frequently find their interests as Flemings in conflict with their political convictions.

On the other hand, the franchise was greatly extended after the last revision of the constitution. On 14th July 1892 there were 136,775 electors. Two years after, on 14th October

188 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

1894, 1,354,891 electors. Voting was compulsory. Thanks to that the Flemings made progress. The more democratic our election system becomes the nearer we are to victory. Power will be wrested from the French lords and a small oligarchy, who thought their duty fulfilled towards the Flemings and their language when they had exclaimed at election time : "*They wanted what was right and won what they wanted.*" How very truly do the words of Cardinal Bourne apply to Belgium : "While the constitution had increased singly on democratic forms, the reality underlying those forms had been increasingly plutocratic."¹

(3) Our Flemish people is not alone master of its destinies. It is the majority in Belgium certainly, but the Walloon minority is comparatively numerous, and it helps to decide the fate of the Flemings.

Almost unanimously the Walloons vote against the just demands of the Flemings. The Catholics, in agreement with the party system, vote with the Government. It is therefore as difficult for the conscientious Fleming as such to become a member of the Government as for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

¹ Cardinal Bourne. *The Nation's Crisis*. Cath. Soc. Guild, London.

The Liberal deputies—and how loudly are their proclaimed theories of liberty contradicted by their behaviour!—have never been favourable to the Flemings. They have been under the influence of French anti-Catholics. The Catholic Flemish people is thus unworthy of attention, or only in so far as by French influence it may be drawn into the anti-religious caucus. Further, the Liberals were, for a long time, *doctrinaires* and very little democratic, while the Flemish Movement is essentially democratic.

Among the Walloon socialists there have been some who recognised the justice of the Flemish cause. But on the other hand we have known Walloon socialists deny that the white man has a mission to civilise the niggers of the Congo, and yet find it quite natural that the Walloon should have a mission to impose his Latin culture on the Flemings. In a word, the Walloon socialists have not bridled their lust for domination. They refuse language rights to the poor Flemish workers in Wallonia, but are ready enough to protect the rich *frans-quillions* in Flanders over language questions.

Let, therefore, a few deputies on the Flemish side betray their people by standing with the Walloon—and all Flemish rights are gone.

With the help of the paid Press and by the

190 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

influence of money and of Catholic, Liberal and socialist associations—and thanks to our election system, with the list vote—enemies of our rights can always succeed in getting elected for Flemish districts. Election promises are shamefully broken.

We only have to cast a glance abroad. In Canada similar occurrences appear, where the Irish frequently oppose the rights of the French. In Alsace-Lorraine the nationalists attempted to found a party. They nominated candidates in election time. Catholics and anti-clericals got the upper hand, as in Belgium; the nationalists were defeated. Has it ever occurred to anyone to tell our people: It is your own fault if you did not obtain satisfaction! On the contrary, all peoples are fighting for liberty—and with them the Flemings and the Walloons.

Our conclusion is as follows. An election does not express exactly the mind of the people. In a general election, where several issues have to be decided, too many influences are at work, especially when a nationalist movement is concerned. To learn more or less definitely the feeling of the people on a certain point there should be a referendum on that one point only. And even then many politicians, Conservatives and socialists alike—*they know what is underneath it all*—have no confidence in the

result. M. Destrée, one of the socialist leaders, will not hear of a plebiscite in Alsace-Lorraine.¹

A people which is being deprived of its rights becomes conscious, but the process takes time. It is with the soul as with the body : it reacts on excitation. But when the excitant is constantly applied, both soul and body become accustomed to it and fail to respond. The force of the excitant has to be increased, and even then the reaction is slow.

Our Flemish people has begun to react. He who does not see it is purblind.

¹ "Plébiscites," *Le Petit Parisien*, 25th July 1917 ; and *Le Socialisme contre l'État*, by Em. Vandervelde. Berger Levrault. Paris. This work was finished when this last book appeared. It strengthened my opinion on this point.

CHAPTER VII

THE CONSEQUENCES OF BILINGUALISM

“ Only the tree that is firm rooted in its own soil can offer us a perfect crown of leaf and blossom. Only the fully national can possibly contribute to the cosmo-national.”—SISTER NEVIDITA, CALCUTTA.

(1) *Sham Satisfaction*

UNFRUITFUL endeavours have been made for centuries to make the Fleming forget his personality, and even his language, by all sorts of institutions alien to his uses and customs. These efforts have greatly harmed our people—and Belgium.

The whole of the *central administration* is French. This is the more harmful to the Flemish country as communal liberties have already been diminished. Small communes below 5000 inhabitants are under the supervision of district commissioners, amongst whom there are some who refuse categorically to correspond with the communes in Flemish.

The larger communes have found that when they wrote in Netherlandish to the central administration their letters, and consequently the assistance, were delayed. This nearly

CONSEQUENCES OF BILINGUALISM 193

every Flemish citizen experienced to disadvantage.

The major of the civil guard in Antwerpen was decorated, although (perhaps because) he did not execute the law relating to the civil guard. In the army one can be a general with French alone, but with Flemish alone one cannot even be a corporal.

The Times will certainly not be accused of demagoguery, yet it wrote on 25th May 1916: "A good Indian Staff Corps officer is not rapidly made. He must know something of India and the Indian people, and must understand the psychology and dialects of his men."

What is found necessary for Indian officers is useless, if not valueless, for Belgian officers!!

When Mr Churchill insisted, in July, 1915, on raising 100,000 Africans, he was told by the Colonial Secretary that it was impossible to find the necessary interpreters, together with the number of officers required, "speaking the language." And when on 23rd May 1916 Mr Churchill insisted, asking that these troops should be ready for 1917, Mr Tennant answered that the unsurmountable difficulty was to find the officers who could speak the national language. Fourteen thousand officers would be wanted for the Indian contingent alone. But Mr Churchill was not discouraged.

194 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

“As for the enrolment of natives, wounded officers might learn the languages during convalescence.”¹

If our boys were to hear of the respect of the English authorities for their black subjects, they might be greatly tempted to become English subjects.

According to Mr Churchill, the officers ought therefore to learn the language of the soldiers “during convalescence.”

When my colleague, Van Cauwelaert, on 22nd November 1917, after three years of war, asked the Belgian Minister of War, General de Ceuninck, to compel the Walloon officers interned in Holland to learn the language of their soldiers, as their stay in Holland offered such an excellent opportunity, then my colleague, on 19th January 1918, after three months of ripe consideration, got the following answer :—
“I think it desirable that those of our officers interned in Holland who do not know, or know very little of, the language of the Flemings should profitably devote their leisure to the study of the Netherlandish language. As those in question are interned, their status does not allow of me giving them any orders! I can only beg the Government of the Netherlands, in the name of the Belgian Government,

¹ *Daily News*, 27th May 1916 and 1st June 1916.

kindly to incite those who might not have done so spontaneously to enter on the way indicated above."

Very politely my colleague is given a blank. It is patent that if the minister was in earnest he would have added: "After the war a knowledge of the language of three-fourths of the soldiers will be required for promotion." Then our professional hierarchy of officers would soon be at their books.

What Mr Churchill asked I asked in vain in the Belgian Parliament on 26th and 27th February 1913.

In military training the instructor must be in direct communication with his men, and any difference of language is an obstacle. Therefore we want capable instructors and educators, speaking the language of their soldiers.

Nevertheless, four-fifths of our soldiers are still being trained by officers who do not understand their men, just as the men do not understand them.

English officers and soldiers will judge what such training is like!

It is patent that it is not designed to promote unity amongst Belgians. What I prophesied in 1913 became reality.

I told the Minister of War: "Sir, look round and see how our people is awakening, and con-

sider what an immense influence this awakening will inevitably have on the relations between the Flemish soldiers and their Walloon comrades and superiors, who do not speak their language and show their contempt for it. The day is near when our army will consist of Walloon and Flemish soldiers, who will desire to see the rights of the people to which they belong respected in full. Those who expect better results from the fusion of these race-conscious Flemings with Walloons in the same regiments will one day have to face an unhappy reality and know that they were mistaken.

“Let us not be satisfied with words ; national union does not spring up at command, and is not created by administrative regulations. Weak, indeed, that union will ever be which is not rooted in the heart. As long as the Flemish soldier in the army is not on an equal footing with the Walloon, as long as the army is not for him a great family where all children are treated equally, so long will he remain cold in his love of the fatherland as represented by the army.”

I finished my speech with the following warning :—

“Let the new military law be the token of solidarity to the two races which make up Belgium, by the complete recognition of their respective rights, by the absolute equality of

the two national languages. On this condition, and on this condition alone, our army will acquire moral power and the fatherland greatness. It is high time to act; administrative separation knocks at the door of the country. Heavy will be the responsibility of the Government, which, not seeing the danger, or pretending to be unaware of it, shall have neglected to guide and lead the two races, Walloons and Flemings, on the road of equality before the law. The Government agrees with it; the Prime Minister, M. de Broqueville, tells us so. If he keeps faith he may count on our support, on our united endeavours in peace time, which is a preparation and a guarantee for a united struggle and victory in time of war."

The Government did not keep faith. A dividing wall exists between our soldiers and their superiors, a wall of difference in language. The word of M. Ribot, "Let them talk in the army, let the officers come into daily contact with their men, let us better their conditions," remains for the Flemings a pious wish.¹ Even to-day it is being objected to us that in the army only one language may be used. A mere pretension! If that were true, then in Belgium this one language ought to be Flemish, as four-fifths of the soldiers are Flemings.

¹ Speech in Parliament, 24th July 1917.

198 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

The educational conditions are not better in Belgium.

Thousands of Flemish children cannot find a school where primary instruction is given in their language. In Brussel alone there are 14,000 Flemish children who are being mentally stultified because instruction is given in a language they do not understand. For our rural population no school for garden or land cultivation, no veterinary school exists where the teaching is in Netherlandish. The sons of our peasants must study French for several years if they want to pursue their special subjects scientifically. The consequence is that they do not study at all.

In 1910 or 1911 Burgomaster Siffer spoke a few words in Netherlandish at the opening of the University of Gent. The academical courts decided that no burgomaster should, in future, be allowed to speak at the opening sitting. The year after, at the initial sitting, a student said a few words in Netherlandish in the name of the students who had won prizes. The academical senate decided that no laureate of the university should speak at the initial sitting. The following year a student spoke in Netherlandish in the name of the student laureates in the triennial competitions. The senate decided that no student should ever be

permitted to speak at the initial sitting of the university.¹

In Belgium there are 3,365,739 inhabitants who know Flemish only, and 2,757,959 inhabitants who speak French only!

What are the conditions in the secondary schools?

(1) For those speaking French there are—

Royal athenæa	.	.	.	20
Communal colleges	.	.	.	7
Subsidised colleges	.	.	.	8

(2) For the Flemings there are—

Royal Flemish athenæa	.	.	.	0
Communal colleges	.	.	.	0
Subsidised colleges	.	.	.	0

Thus the right is denied to the Flemings to have their children instructed in their own language. If Flemish children wish to become educated, they must begin by learning a foreign tongue. There is indeed a law requiring two courses to be given in Netherlandish. So that the law could not be applied, or that, at least, its effects should be nullified, the Ministry of Education set Walloons (who do not know Netherlandish) over more than half of those institutions in Flemish Belgium.

¹ F. Daels. Professor in Gent University. *Ons Vaderland*, 4th April 1918.

200 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

The Flemings have no higher education in their own language. They are worse than the Ruthenes and the Poles, for whose liberation our Flemish soldiers, according to the Hon. Minister, Count Goblet d'Alviella, are fighting and pouring out their blood.¹ The whole of the administration is French. With French alone one attains to the highest positions. With Netherlandish alone one does not even become a train conductor. With two languages the Fleming does not get as far as the Walloons with one, because the Fleming rarely knows or speaks French as well as the Walloon does.

In spite of existing laws, officials who do not know Netherlandish are still appointed in Flanders. Many judges who are said to know Netherlandish speak it in a fashion of which a street boy would be ashamed.

Technical education scarcely exists in Flanders. It would be impossible to find teachers knowing the tongue of the working classes. Conditions are not better in the Catholic schools. Hatred of everything Netherlandish was pushed so far in Catholic institutions that we students—I have known those times—had to watch each other to detect those

¹ C. Goblet d'Alviella. *Le Vrai et le Faux Pacifisme*. Alcan, Paris.

speaking their mother-tongue. One had to hand them a little booklet, called *Signum*. In this booklet the culprit had to write his name. He then got a punishment from the professor—and *the book*—and was dismissed to catch a victim to whom he, in turn, would hand over the *Signum*. The following example, told by Professor Vermeyleylen,¹ professor at the University of Brussel, speaks volumes :—“ A short time ago the league of ex-university students of West Vlaanderen went to ask the Bishop of Brugge to allow the students of Flanders in the boarding schools and seminaries to speak Netherlandish on Sundays and feast days, and during their walks in the country . . .” (*sic*) The Bishop answered that it was found difficult to accede to that demand.

(2) *Backwardness of the Flemish People*

(i) *Development.*

That things are not going well with the development and the education of our Flemish people everyone who comes into relation with them can see for himself. The best standards for framing a judgment about the situation are :

¹ Professor Vermeyleylen. *Kritiek der Vlaamsche Beweging*. Van Dishoek. Bussum.

202 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

(a) *Official Statistics*.—According to these, as given officially, in Belgium there are 94,000 Belgians over fifteen years old who are unable to read or write. The proportion is remarkably higher for the Flemings than for the Walloons.

NUMBER OF ILLITERATES PER PROVINCE

1. Luxemburg	.	16·65	per cent.	Walloon Province
2. Namur	.	14·87	"	" "
3. Liège	.	19·62	"	" "
4. Brabant	.	22·95	"	Partially Flemish- Walloon
5. Antwerpen	.	25·50	"	Flemish
6. Hainaut	.	29·91	"	Walloon
7. Limburg	.	27·31	"	Flemish
8. West Vlaanderen		30·06	"	Flemish
9. Oost	"	31·06	"	Flemish

Hainaut is the only one Walloon province that approaches the Flemish province of Antwerpen. The immigration of the Flemings is bound to have a deleterious influence on this percentage.

(b) *Mr Rowntree* made a very thorough investigation in Belgium. This is the table drawn up by him.¹

¹ S. Rowntree. *Land and Labour in Belgium*, p. 267. Macmillan. London.

[TABLE.]

CONSEQUENCES OF BILINGUALISM 203

ILLITERATES CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO AGE. (THOSE WHO CAN NEITHER READ NOR WRITE—WORKING CLASSES ONLY)

	10 to 20 years		21 to 40 years		Over 40 years	
	Number of Persons investigated	Per cent. of Illiterates	Number of Persons investigated	Per cent. of Illiterates	Number of Persons investigated	Per cent. of Illiterates
Large towns						
{ male .	549	10.37	577	7.27	321	14.64
{ female .	395	8.10	547	9.01	301	29.56
{ together	944	9.42	1124	8.09	622	21.86
Flemish						
{ male .	784	25.63	815	21.59	451	49.66
{ female .	690	26.22	795	38.23	437	66.81
{ together	1474	25.84	1610	29.81	888	58.10
Walloon						
{ male .	1153	7.11	1422	14.13	843	30.01
{ female .	1062	6.40	1333	16.12	795	41.13
{ together	2215	6.77	2755	15.10	1638	36.02
Whole country						
{ male .	2486	13.67	2814	14.53	1615	32.44
{ female .	2147	13.08	1275	21.23	1533	46.18
{ together	4633	13.43	5489	17.98	3148	39.13

204 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

Mr Rowntree further noted that the proportion is much higher for the Flemish than for the Walloon population. In the Flemish-speaking communes (Brussel, Antwerpen and Gent not included) more than one-third of the population over ten years of age is illiterate. In the Walloon communes (Liège not included) the percentage is only 17. Therefore, as a consequence of the very thorough investigation of Mr Rowntree, there are twice as many illiterates in the Flemish as in the Walloon districts (see Figs. 1 and 2, p. 281).

Those figures cannot be deemed sufficient. The proportion of the more educated people is smaller too in the Flemish country. Let us compare the results of the examinations from 1884 to 1892. We exclude the province of Brabant, which is bilingual.

Students who obtained a certificate, or three-fifths of the marks :

PERCENTAGE IN THE FLEMISH PROVINCES

Year	Antwerpen	West Vlaanderen	Oost Vl.	Limburg
1885 .	18·1	9·8	10·6	9·4
1886 .	47	41	35	48
1887 .	44·92	20·49	31·56	22·44
1888 .	57·24	39·01	40·68	42·47
1889 .	57·79	54·97	45·17	61·87
1890 .	68·88	54·93	40·29	72·95
1891 .	70·80	57·98	51·81	73·22
1892 .	70·67	45	49·39	66·04

CONSEQUENCES OF BILINGUALISM 205

PERCENTAGE IN THE WALLOON PROVINCES

Year	Hainaut	Liège	Luxemburg	Namur
1885 .	50·3	70·7	26·9	38·5
1886 .	77	73	63	73
1887 .	59·94	69·02	52·63	60·13
1888 .	64·80	70·10	63·53	65·92
1889 .	78·88	80·61	74·86	78·27
1890 .	80·42	83·54	80·05	82·16
1891 .	77·95	79·19	67·21	82·96
1892 .	70·90	77·14	83·33	83·46

These figures prove :

(a) That in the Flemish provinces during the years 1885-1892 about 45·61 per cent. of the examinees obtained six-tenths of the marks.

(b) That for the Walloon provinces the proportion increased for the same period to 69·98 per cent.

Not less instructive is the following table, giving the proportion of the holders of certificates to the number of pupils :—

Antwerpen .	3·36 per cent.	Hainaut .	5·35 per cent.
West Vlaanderen	2·47 „	Liège .	4·30 „
Oost „	1·61 „	Luxemburg	5·80 „
Limburg .	3·52 „	Namur .	9·20 „

Conclusion

(a) In Flanders, of 10,000 pupils attending school about 277 obtain six-tenths of the marks.

206 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

(b) In Wallonia 538 obtain this amount.

In the army soldiers are divided into several classes :

- (1) Without instruction.
- (2) Able to read.
- (3) Able to read and write.
- (4) Able to read and write and calculate.
- (5) With a higher instruction.

Statistics show that the proportion of the 4th and 5th classes is larger amongst the Walloons.

<i>Fourth Class</i> :	Flemings, 52·37 ;	Walloons, 55·47	} Cf. Figs. 3 and 4.
<i>Fifth Class</i> :	Flemings, 14·56 ;	Walloons, 24·22	

As one sees, 14 per cent. Flemings enjoy higher education, as against 24 per cent. of Walloons. Is it astonishing that Walloons occupy the best positions ? After the war we will inquire into the proportion of Flemish and Walloon boys taking something more than a primary education. And so one will be able to come to a conclusion with regard to the backwardness of Flanders. Among the Flemish emigrants there are some who occupy commanding, some who occupy secondary positions, but the generality is absolutely below the normal. They have not the power to climb, because they lack the necessary qualifications.

(ii) *Poverty.*

Pauperism is much more prominent in Flanders than in Wallonia. We again use Mr Rowntree's figures¹ :

Province	Per cent. of the Population
Antwerpen	4·60
Brabant	8·09
West Vlaanderen . .	9·04
Oost „	8·66
Hainaut	2·92
Liège	3·15
Limburg	7·49
Luxemburg	2·08
Namur	4·77

(iii) *Low Wages.*

Flanders had been since the Middle Ages the centre of the Belgian—nay, the centre of European—industry. Its Flemish spinning and weaving were known everywhere.

After 1830 industry moved slowly to Wallonia. At present there are, according to Rowntree,² 392,000 industrial workmen in Flanders, as against 522,000 in Wallonia, Brabant not included.

Wages are extremely low in Flanders and

¹ S. Rowntree. *Land and Labour in Belgium*, p. 475. Macmillan. London.

² *Ibid.*, p. 71

208 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

working hours are very long. This is particularly the case in the cotton industry, where the number of women employed is very high, especially in Oost Vlaanderen. In Gent, *e.g.*, one woman out of three works ; in Liège, one out of twenty. Let us compare, according to the statistics for 1896 (the latest published) the wages for workmen over sixteen years. For a few examples see Table, p. 209.

(iv) *Working Hours.*

In the cotton trade, which is almost entirely carried on in the Flemish provinces, the difference between Belgian and English wages is very pronounced ; although the hours of work are generally about 20 per cent. longer in Belgium than in England, the weekly earnings in almost all the different occupations are considerably less.

Home work is very widespread in Flanders, women slaving on starvation pay.

(v) *Death-Rate of Children.*

The death-rate amongst children is very high in Flanders. Again we have to build on the statements of Mr Rowntree, who declares the infant mortality at Gent to be higher than that of any other town in Belgium—viz. 23·1 per hundred births per annum, taking the

WALLOON INDUSTRIES

Number of Workpeople earning (in francs) :														
	Toget-her	Less than 1·50	1·50 to 1·99	2 to 2·49	2·50 to 2·99	3 to 3·49	3·50 to 3·99	4 to 4·49	4·50 to 4·99	5 to 5·49	5·50 to 5·99	6 to 6·49	6·50 to 6·99	7 and more
Coal-mines	96,660	619	2,084	16,753	16,662	24,796	18,340	15,632	6862	2828	994	527	239	324
Quarries	22,858	644	976	3,526	5,495	5,235	3,269	1,985	948	646	201	149	35	47
Toolmaking Industries.	27,965	466	11,326	2,501	4,367	4,901	5,292	4,188	2291	1501	559	275	133	151
Flemish Industry : Spinning and Weaving.														
Cotton	5,980	330	800	1,225	1,558	882	554	305	163	101	26	25	6	5
Flax	6,816	556	1,353	1,901	1,627	732	353	195	67	18	9	2	1	2

210 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

average of the five years between 1903 and 1907, as against 12·9 at Liège. We should have preferred to quote more general official figures, but, working in war-time, away from the fatherland, we are compelled to make shift with the documents at hand. We feel, nevertheless, confident that nobody contradicts the fact that child mortality is much higher in the Flemish country than in Wallonia. (We have already published, after careful research, a pamphlet on this question.) This difference is certainly explained in fact by the larger numbers of births in Flanders, but it is quite as true that the lower social condition of the Flemish women also contributes to it (see Figs. 5 and 6, p. 281).

(vi) *Technical Education.*

Technical education is little developed in Flanders. It was never given the attention it deserves. The general culture of the Flemish worker is so low that it is nearly impossible to give him a technical education. This appears very clearly in an interview which Mr Rowntree had with the director of the technical school. Who amongst us has not heard similar complaints ?

Education, says Mr Rowntree, did nothing to enlarge the view of the Flemish worker ;

he lives in a state of apathy ; he prefers to go on toiling as his fathers did, and it is difficult to persuade him to abandon his old habits.

(vii) *Agriculture.*

After having shown all these dark sides of our position, it would be unpardonable not to point out the flourishing state of our agriculture, which has been growing so much during the last years.

If Flanders does not possess Netherlandish horticultural, agricultural or veterinary schools, it would be unfair if we did not express our admiration for everything done to promote agricultural instruction by official and private institutions.

(3) *Is the Backwardness of the Flemish People due to French Influences ?*

It would be foolish to pretend that French influence alone is responsible for these conditions. There are reasons of all kinds, but French traditions, as long as they exist, will make all progress impossible, even if the other causes no longer existed.

(a) We have already shown that every people the use of whose language is discouraged becomes a subject people, culturally and economically.

(b) This is the case in Belgium more than anywhere else, because Netherlandish differs so greatly from French.

That is why it is impossible for our Flemish folk to learn French, but the more difficult it proved, the more time was spent over it, and hence the more time was taken from the studies tending to mental development. They wanted to teach children French and they did not even succeed in making them read and write.

As soon as the Francophils have taught our people to read, write and reckon, then we will consider whether it is to the advantage of our people to learn a second language, and if the time allotted for educational purposes is sufficient for our children to learn French.

Are the supporters of the French language, people belonging mainly to a conservative class, ready to take measures that will allow the children of the working class to stay a few years longer at school so as to learn French ?

(c) Is it by chance, or is there a connection between the facts that at Gent, where French influences most prevail, there are 101 men and 128 women per thousand unable to read and write ?

(d) And is it mere chance, as Mr Rowntree says, that there are more illiterates amongst people from ten to twenty than amongst those

from twenty-one to forty years? Mr Rowntree says he cannot explain the fact. Well, the retrogression corresponds with a period of increasing attention to the French language.

(e) "It is a striking fact," says Mr S. Rowntree, "that there should be twice as many illiterate persons in the Flemish as in the Walloon districts of Belgium, and it cannot fail to have a bearing upon the relative social well-being of the two peoples. Until the standard of education is raised the Flemish people will be seriously handicapped in their efforts to improve their social status."

(f) We further maintain that the time devoted to the French language by the children of our working people has been lost; the whole of this book goes to prove it, and if the time spent uselessly on French had been devoted to technical education our Flemish boys would have been able to earn better wages.

(g) We know, further, that in Flanders many positions for which technical knowledge is required have been occupied by foreigners because the Flemings did not know enough to fill them.

(h) We know also that lack of technical education is one of the reasons why Flemish industry has produced such a small volume of finished and refined articles.

(i) We know, too, that the cultured classes, who do their studies partly at the expense of the community (since every student at the University of Gent costs the state 1000 francs yearly), are unable to fulfil their social obligations towards the people, seeing that they speak another tongue.

(j) We know furthermore that a Flemish boy cannot get on so well as a Walloon boy, for the latter gets further with one language, which he knows well, than the first with two languages, one of which he knows badly—and that the “obligatory” one.

A Walloon, Charles Antoine Candel, predicted these consequences shortly after 1830 : “Civilisation is being propagated by the same means which serve as vehicles for thought, viz. amongst others, by speech and reading. But, as it is easy to understand, these two centres of light remain without effect, or nearly so, every time the written language, the language of the government, business and the higher classes of society is not the language of the people. It remains, in this case, stationary in its development ; there is between the people and the commoners of civilisation an unsurmountable barrier, a whole language which they will never learn. To them conversation and reading are closed doors, and instead of

occupying their leisure moments with matters which tend to adorn the heart and mind, and to enlarge their circle of knowledge, they are miserably left to themselves and condemned to cultivate eternally the stock of vices and virtues once acquired.

This in a few months is the moral position of a nation on which a foreign language has been imposed. This picture, however dark it may already be, still falls short of the truth.

The individual who has had to give up his maternal tongue is hit mortally in his intellectual life, and he is robbed of all the advantages, material and spiritual, to which only a perfect knowledge of his own speech gives access. He cannot fill the positions to which his capacities entitle him; he has to give up many enterprises which might better his conditions. Every day he is in danger of becoming the dupe of his ignorance, because he has to confide his interests to strangers, although he would have been able to defend them much better personally and without any expense. Finally, if on the one hand he profits very little by the enlightenment of his time to perfect his mind and increase his knowledge, one might add that, on the other hand, he contributes nearly nothing to the spread of that enlighten-

ment. For notwithstanding all the capacities he may have, he will meet difficulties everywhere to discourage him, and he will never make himself as useful to society by his writings or by his works as he might have done without this language bar.

That is not all. An alien language not only makes its pernicious consequences felt among the lower and the middle classes; it goes further. It engenders a new evil by stamping on the whole nation, but especially on the higher classes, the imprint of an imitative servility towards the country from which it borrows the language.

For, this culpable and ridiculous affection for everything coming from abroad falsifies the imagination, unnerves the mind, smothers every germ of nationality, and with it love of the fatherland and of independence.

What is to be expected from him whose national character is vitiated, whose very likes and dislikes are uncertain, who sees a merit in no longer being anything by himself, and who centres his ambition in a more or less perfect imitation of foreign ways and customs? Surely nothing great, nothing noble, nothing showing the masculine dignity inherent to every man who preserves the purity and strength of his character.

A nation is capable of real improvement in so far only as it remains itself, and develops the qualities which tend specially to strengthen its life. In true love of self, in the development of individual faculties, lies the preserving principle of the individual. If you destroy this fundamental, this prime essential of our moral and intellectual personality, nothing is left of us. We exchange a value absolute and inherent to our personality for another which is relative only, and which depends on the model proposed for our imitation. Instead of revolving freely round our own self, we are alternately attracted by different *centres* situated outside ourselves and outside the sphere of our ability.

But by the displacement of the *centre* the principle of all intellectual liberty is brought to naught, and without an entire liberty of mind one must not reckon on a stable national independence.

These are the general thoughts suggested by the language differences which divide Belgium into two nearly equal parts, and which, in present circumstances, when people are busy rebuilding the social structure, cannot be passed over in silence because they have an intimate relation with the principle which silently vivified European political movements.¹ Let us include

¹ *Ons Vaderland.*

here a letter from a Flemish soldier : it is more eloquent than anything of our own :

“ It is unhappy and disheartening to serve in our army when one is a Fleming, because there is so much inequality between us and the Walloons.

“(1) The Fleming has more difficulties with his service, as all words of command are given in French.

“(2) A Fleming may be ever so well educated, and be of perfectly good conduct, yet he will never have the opportunity of following the class for the rank of brigadier.

“This opportunity is easily and frequently provided for the Walloon. That is why there are batteries in which Flemings who have been campaigning since the beginning of the war, and have even been twice wounded and decorated, have been replaced by Walloons with from twelve to thirteen months' service only, and who have, as it were, never been at the front, but who could follow the necessary course for brigadier.

“But if by some chance a Fleming is given permission to follow the course what good is it to him, since he cannot read the books provided ? For in the Belgian army, though there are ever so many more Flemings than Walloons, there is not a single book of

instructions or regulations written in Flemish. Although he is as clever and good a soldier as may be, he has to give way to the Walloon, who sometimes knows nothing more than what he has learned from the books. There are in the — battery several men of this kind, and to these men Flemings who have been wounded have to give way, even if they are Knights of the Order of Leopold, and are covered by wounds received in action with the infantry. All this because as Flemings they are neglected.”

This man speaks from experience. He is a Knight of the Order of Leopold and wears the War Cross.

We ask every straightforward man: Does such a situation cry out for alteration? When in 1908 the rights of the Jewish children to education were curtailed in Russia; when again this decree was made more stringent in 1914; when Germany imposed the Teutonic tongue on the Poles—that was talked about everywhere. But our plight left the world cold! We Flemings did not speak loud enough!

The bilingual system has brought us dissatisfaction—of such a nature that it must become a danger to our nationality if a remedy is not found at once.

Justice alone can dissipate it. Dissatisfaction born of injustice can only be appeased by

220 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

justice. Devotion cannot be secured by injustice or by fear.

Only madmen would attempt to stifle dissatisfaction born of injustice by weak and foolish measures of oppression. History tells what awaits them.

“What is fatal to the growth of a sense of nationality is that one of the constituent races should cherish a conviction of its own superiority, and that this conviction should be embodied in law or custom.”¹

Worst of all, the bilingual system has engendered in Flanders a caste system more evil than anything in the Middle Ages.

A cultured class exists side by side with the poor and generally ignorant population. Between the two there is the dividing wall of bilingualism. A nation in which the rich class is separated by language and interests from the poorer classes, with other interests and ideas and tongue, is doomed to disaster. It is moving inevitably towards disintegration.

¹ Professor Ramsey Muir. *Nationalism and Internationalism*. Constable. London.

CHAPTER VIII

IS FLANDERS BILINGUAL ?

Nature followed its course and proved in our country, as everywhere, that mules are sterile.—FR. VAN CAUWELAERT, M.P.

To find a mathematical answer to this question we will consider in turn—

1. Is Belgium bilingual—in what sense ?
2. Is Flanders bilingual ?
3. Is Wallonia bilingual ?

1. *Is Belgium bilingual ?*

What do the official statistics for the year 1910 tell us ? ¹

Inhabitants	Speaking Nether- landish only	Speaking Nether- landish and French	Speaking Nether- landish and German	Speaking three Languages	Speaking French only	Speaking French and German	Speaking German only
7,092,891 ²	3,220,662	871,288	8652	52,547	2,833,334	74,903	31,415
Per cent.	45·4	12·3	0·1	0·7	39·9	1·1	0·4

From these figures we learn that 12 per cent. only of the Belgian population pretend to know two languages. We say “pretend” to

¹ *Annuaire Statistique de la Belgique* Ministère de l'Intérieur. A. Lesigne. Bruxelles. 1914.

² Over two years of age.

222 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

know. For how many vainglorious snobs and "Brusseleers" announce themselves bilingual who could not, for three minutes, carry on a familiar conversation in both languages.

Still, taking the figures as they are, we are able to conclude that Belgium is bilingual in so far as two languages are spoken there, but not that *the Belgian* speaks two languages. In Belgium there are Walloons who speak Walloon or French and Flemings who speak Netherlandish. What is their proportion? How many Walloons are there and how many Flemings?

M. Passelecq states in his very remarkable book ¹ that in 1910—

3,832,162 inhabitants spoke or knew French.

4,153,149 ,, ,, ,, Netherlandish.

Hence there is nearly equality of knowledge of the national languages, with a slight predominance of Flemish. This almost even distribution is one of the special features of the language conditions in Belgium. As M. Destrecq says, it proves that the Belgian language question stands on a very particular plane. One cannot think of solving it as one can in France, England, Italy and Germany, where the

¹ Passelecq. *La Question Flamande et l'Allemagne*, p. 30. Berger Levrault. Paris.

number of those who do not speak the national language can be neglected. No, there are in Belgium *two* national languages, and those speaking them are fully entitled to equal civic rights.¹

Far be it from us to contradict the conclusions of M. Destrée, with whom M. Passelecq is in agreement. Nevertheless, we desire to point out that the majority of Flemings is greater in Belgium than M. Passelecq seems to think, and that the balance referred to will more and more be broken in favour of the Flemings. We may add that we do not assert that because the Flemings are in a majority therefore Netherlandish must be *the* language of Belgium. On the contrary, we think that a large minority has a right to equal rights with the majority. We should be one of the first to fight with, and for, the Walloons on the day an attempt is made to encroach on their rights. We have always held the opinion, and still cling to it, that the Flemish question will have to be solved along the line of least resistance, and that there must be demanded from the Walloons only that irreducible minimum, without which it would be an impossibility for Walloons and Flemings to live side by side.

¹ "Le Principe des Nationalités." *Grande Revue*, May, 1916, p. 394.

224 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

Our sole aim is to state facts as they are, and secondly, to forestall the drawing of certain conclusions from the facts as stated erroneously by M. Passelecq (such as the answer of the Minister of War to one of the questions I put to him. From that answer it appears that Flemings who know French lose their rights as Flemish citizens). Where lies, then, the inexactitude in the data of M. Passelecq ?

He increases, as by magic, the Belgian population and counts *twice* those who speak two and three languages. M. Passelecq adds them first to the French-speaking and secondly to the Netherlandish Belgians.

According to him there are—

2,833,334 Belgians who speak French only.			
871,288	„	„	French and Netherlandish.
74,992	„	„	French and German.
52,547	„	„	the three languages.
<hr/>			
And so there are	} 3,832,161 „ „ French.		

On the other hand there are—

3,220,662 Belgians who speak Netherlandish only.			
871,288	„	„	Netherlandish and French.
52,547	„	„	the three languages.
8,652	„	„	Netherlandish and German.
<hr/>			
And we get	} 4,153,149 „ „ Netherlandish.		

Accordingly, Belgium numbered, in 1910,
 $3,832,161 + 4,153,149 = 7,985,310$ inhabitants.

As a matter of fact there were only 7,423,784. Consequently M. Passelecq counts 561,526 inhabitants more than there were. And the bilingual people, whom M. Passelecq also adds to the Walloons, are with a few exceptions all Flemings. The immense majority of the Flemings who know two languages do not abandon their rights as Flemish citizens.

Real conditions ought to read as follows:—

There are 4,153,149 people who speak Netherlandish, against 2,833,334 people who speak French.

And still these figures are not accurate.

For in 1910 there were 7,423,237 inhabitants, of whom 254,547 were foreigners and 7,169,237 Belgians. With the exception of the Dutch, the foreigners speak French and do not know Netherlandish.

On the other hand, children under two years are not included in these statistics. It would be fairer to do so.

To arrive, therefore, at the number of Netherlandish- and French-speaking people we must deduct the number of foreigners and add the number of children.

Statistics show that 330,893 inhabitants, children under two years included, do not speak any language. On the other hand, there are 6645 inhabitants over two years who do not

226 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

speak any of the national languages (dumb, etc.). The number of children under two years is therefore 330,893 less 6645, or 324,248. Two-thirds of these are children of Flemings, making 216,166, and one-third children of Walloons, 108,083.

We accordingly get the following result :—

Out of 7,169,237 Belgians there are—

$4,153,149 + 216,166 = 4,369,315$ Flemings.

$2,833,334 + 108,083 = 2,941,417$ Walloons.

Or—

$4,369,315$ Flemings = 60 per cent.

$2,941,417$ Walloons = 40 per cent.

Total	$7,310,732$	100 per cent.
-------	-------------	---------------

Individually, the inhabitants of Belgium, like the peoples of all countries, speak *one* language. It may be said, however, that Belgians speak two languages, but only in this sense—that Flemings and Walloons are neighbours to each other all over the country, just as in certain parts of South Africa Boers and English are neighbours (see Table, p. 227).

Amongst those Flemish provinces there is only one which is entirely situated above the language frontier, the province of Antwerpen. Only 1 per cent. of the population does not know Netherlandish, and 83 per cent. is monolingual. We return to this fact later on. In

FLEMISH PROVINCES

Province	Fig.	Inhabitants ¹	Speaking Nether- landish	Speaking Nether- landish and French (V. F.)	Speaking Nether- landish and German (V. D.)	Speaking three Languages (T.)	Speaking French (F.)	Speaking French and German (F. D.)	Speaking German (D.)
Antwerpen .		919,525	762,414	113,606	5651	17,857	12,289	2660	5048
Limburg .		259,251	218,622	29,386	435	1,209	9,123	251	225
Oost Vlaanderen		1,066,630	934,143	116,889	401	5,233	9,311	397	256
West Vlaanderen		828,865	669,081	123,938	192	3,197	31,825	467	165
Antwerpen .	9	Per cent.	83	12	1	2	1	—	1
Limburg .	10	„	84	11	—	—	4	—	—
Oost Vlaanderen	11	„	88	11	—	—	1	—	—
West Vlaanderen	12	„	81	15	—	—	4	—	—

¹ Over two years of age.

228 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

the other provinces the proportion of those who speak French seems rather high—namely, 3 per cent.

I say *seems* so, for they really do not number so many. Two factors influence the figures.

First, amongst the people who speak French there are many foreigners. In the province of Antwerpen there are 4832 Frenchmen; in the province of Limburg they number 586; in the province of West Vlaanderen, 17,331; in the province of Oost Vlaanderen, 6800. If one deducts the number of these foreigners from the number of French-speaking people, one comes to the conclusion that in the province of Antwerpen there are but 7457 people who speak French only, or 0·8 per cent; in Limburg, 8537, or 3 per cent.; in Oost Vlaanderen, 2511, or 2 per cent.; in West Vlaanderen, 14,494, or 1 per cent.

Further, to the south of those provinces there are a few communes inhabited by Walloons, and those communes are situated below the language frontier. In the interest of the inhabitants—*salus populi, suprema lex*—common-sense would exchange those communes for Flemish communes situated in the north of the Walloon provinces. What an easing of administration! In the Walloon provinces of Hainaut and Liège all assistance is systematic-

ally refused to the Flemish communes by the provincial administration if the demands are made in Flemish. Even the official Netherlandish deliberations of Flemish communes are returned by governors of provinces. One can guess what reception is given to requests bearing only the Flemish communal stamp. If the exchange suggested were effected, it would be clear that the inhabitants of the Flemish provinces *are* Flemish (see Table, p. 230).

Here, also, no contradiction is possible. The Flemings of the province of Liège are well to the north of the language frontier, in the north of the province. In Hainaut a few groups dwell at Charleroi. They were not born there ; they are immigrants.

There remains the province of Brabant (see Table, p. 231).

The district of Nivelles is Walloon, with the exception of a single commune in the north. The district of Leuven is Flemish, with the exception of one or two communes and one or two Walloon professors at the University of Leuven.

230 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

WALLOON PROVINCES

Province	Fig. Inhabitants ¹	Speaking Nether- landish (V.)	Speaking Nether- landish and French (V. F.)	Speaking Nether- landish and German (V. D.)	Speaking three Languages (I.)	Speaking French (F.)	Speaking French and German (F. D.)	Speaking German (D.)
Hainaut .	1,184,666	17,283	49,575	50	1028	1,113,738	2,560	432
Liège .	856,372	14,726	50,068	474	4229	748,504	28,627	9,744
Luxembourg .	220,773	153	1,393	32	391	183,218	24,099	11,487
Namur .	349,508	733	4,436	50	440	342,379	1,399	71
Hainaut .	13 per cent.	1	4	—	—	94	—	—
Liège .	14 "	2	6	—	—	87	3	1
Luxembourg .	15 "	—	1	—	—	83	11	5
Namur .	16 "	—	1	—	—	98	—	—

¹ Over two years of age.

PROVINCE OF BRABANT

Province of Brabant	Fig.	Inhabitants ¹	Speaking Netherlandish (V.)	Speaking Netherlandish and French (V. F.)	Speaking Netherlandish and German (V. D.)	Speaking three Languages (T.)	Speaking French (F.)	Speaking French and German (F. D.)	Speaking German (D.)
Province .		1,407,301	603,507	381,997	1367	18,963	382,947	14,533	3987
Arrondissement of:									
Nivelles .		170,815	1,274	6,871	19	173	162,042	353	83
Leuven .		254,412	208,067	36,273	155	1,397	8,050	314	156
Brussel .		982,074	394,166	338,853	1193	17,393	212,855	13,866	3748
Province .	17	Per cent.	43	27	—	1	27	1	—
Arrondissement of:									
Nivelles .	18	"	1	4	—	—	95	—	—
Leuven .	19	"	82	14	—	1	3	—	—
Brussel .	20	"	40	35	—	2	22	1	—

¹ Over two years of age.

232 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

The district of Brussel deserves our special attention.

BRUSSEL AGGLOMERATION, COMINES AND ENGHIE

Communes	Fig.	Inhabit- ants	Speaking one Language				Speaking two Languages	
			French (F.) Total	Per cent.	Nether- landish (V.) Total	Per cent.	Nether- landish and French (V. F.) Total	Per cent.
Brussel . . .	21	177,078	47,385	27	29,081	16	85,414	49
Anderlecht . .	22	64,137	11,211	17	24,320	38	23,486	37
Etterbeek . .	23	33,227	11,207	34	6,596	20	13,166	40
Elsene . . .	24	72,991	39,473	54	6,733	9	19,799	27
Laeken . . .	25	35,024	4,720	13	12,720	36	15,230	43
Schaerbeek . .	26	82,480	20,975	25	13,677	17	40,525	49
St Gilles . . .	27	63,240	14,376	24	5,928	9	27,497	43
St Jan's Mol- enbeek . . .	28	72,783	11,663	16	24,910	34	31,331	43
St Joost ten Noode . . .	29	31,865	10,547	33	3,349	11	14,859	49
Vorst . . .	30	23,538	7,975	34	5,247	22	8,756	37
Watermael- Boschvoorde .	31	8,613	2,001	23	2,674	31	3,324	39
Comines . . .	32	6,641	1,613	24	1,868	28	2,838	43
Enghien . . .	33	4,588	711	15	910	20	2,706	59
Total . . .	34	676,205	183,857	27	138,013	20	288,931	43

It is necessary to note that in the first column children under two years are included. They are not included in the other columns. The percentage given is therefore only approximately correct. This method of calculating is to the disadvantage of the Flemings, as they have more children than the Walloons. If children were to be counted the proportion of Flemings would certainly be greater.

'Statistics tell us, first, that the French who speak only one language are more numerous than the Flemish who do so ; and, secondly, that the agglomeration is bilingual in this sense, that Walloons speaking only one language neighbour Flemings who are in the same position.

In this sense only, therefore, is the agglomeration bilingual, and even less so than might appear at first sight, for a few communes are rather more Flemish than Walloon.

We read with the utmost astonishment in the manifesto of the town councillors of the Brussel group to the German chancellor : "*French is the mother-tongue of a much larger part of the population than Netherlandish.*"¹

These gentlemen forget that in many communes a large minority knows, or pretends to know, French and Flemish ; that this minority consists essentially of Flemings, and that their mother-tongue is Netherlandish. There are in the total 288,931 such people out of a population of 676,205—that is to say, 42 per cent.

¹ *Protestation des Conseils Communaux de l'Agglomération Bruxelloise au Chancelier de l'Empire Allemand.* November, 1917.

284 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

	French and Nether- landish	Population	Per cent.
Brussel	85,414	177,078	48
Anderlecht	23,486	64,137	36
Etterbeek	13,166	33,227	39
Vorst	8,756	23,538	37
Etterbeek	19,799	72,991	27
Lacken	15,230	35,024	43
St Jan's Molenbeek . .	31,331	72,783	43
St Gilles	27,497	63,240	43
St Joost ten Noode . .	14,859	31,865	43
Schaarbeek	40,525	82,480	49
Watermael-Boschvoorde .	3,324	8,613	38
Comines	2,838	6,641	42
Enghien	2,706	4,588	58
Total	288,931	676,205	42

These town councillors of Brussel forget that we Flemings, although we know French, have no intention of giving up our rights as Flemish citizens. These gentlemen reason thus : " Flemings, in Belgium we have managed things so well that you cannot become a corporal even without knowing French. Thus you are compelled to learn French if you want to be something. It is to your advantage." The good Fleming is convinced. He learns a little French. And then those gentlemen turn round and say : " You know French ! Excellent ! And now you lose your rights as a Flemish citizen ! "

It would be better for those civic authorities to say to their subordinates: "Get children like the Flemings!" That good counsel followed, there would be no need for them to rob us of our children.

If the outcome of our learning French is to bring about the loss of our Flemish soul, our Flemish citizenship, then in future we shall learn English instead of French; it will be ever so much easier, and more useful too. More useful because, after this war, English will be the language of the world. M. Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, whose authority is undoubted, wrote in 1913, before the war: "It is with profound regret that one sees this beautiful French language, immortalised by so many masterpieces, threatened . . . with relegation to the rank of a simple literary language, a subject for study and purely æsthetic admiration, as is, *e.g.*, the language of Provence. . . . Abroad, the French language loses ground everywhere. The languages of the prolific peoples, English and German, tend to replace French. The gradually dwindling number of adherents of the French language is an unavoidable consequence of the ever-decreasing birth-rate of France. It is not even certain that the French language remains the first among the Latin languages, and that France

236 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

keeps her influence as elder sister among the Latin peoples. The expansion of the Spanish people in America will make the distance between the number of those who speak Spanish and those who speak French wider and wider every decade. When the first numbers 200,000,000, which will perhaps require a century, the 45,000,000 or 50,000,000 (at most) of those whose mother-tongue is French will have quite a lot of trouble to maintain the dignity of their language even amongst the Latin peoples.”¹

What would Leroy-Beaulieu say to-day, in 1918?

English is spoken by 120,000,000 people; French is spoken by 32,000,000, the 12,000,000 speaking Provençal not included.² English literature possesses treasures unknown to our people until now. We are entirely in agreement with these words of Sir Walter Raleigh, professor of English literature in Oxford University: “The greatest gain of all was the entry of America [into the war], which assured the triumph of our common language.”³

And as to the ease with which it is learnt, I

¹ Paul Leroy-Beaulieu. *La Question de la Dépopulation*, p. 494. Nouv. Coll. Scientifique. Alcan. Paris. 1913.

² De Mangeon. *Dictionnaire de Géographie*. Colin. Paris. 1907.

³ Meeting in Caxton Hall, London, 13th February 1918. *Daily Telegraph*, 14th February.

have had undoubted proof of that from my children since the beginning of the war. After six months in an English day school they spoke English fluently. After a whole year's residence in a French institution they are not yet able to speak French.

We add immediately that the Flemings have social and civic duties towards the Walloons, and that for that reason they have to learn French in preference to English. The universality of a language is, in general, not of so much importance as is often thought. For a person who has to stay in Portugal it is more useful to know Portuguese than English. A Walloon who has to do his business in Flanders must speak Dutch in preference to English. Everybody has to learn the language of the people with which he is living in order to exercise his profession and to fulfil his social and Christian duties towards those with whom he is living in his nation.

Let us now examine the protest of the town councillors of Brussel and suburbs to the German Imperial chancellor.

BRUSSEL, 8th November 1917.

EXCELLENCY,

If it is true that Netherlandish is spoken¹ by a notable part of our population,

¹ The word SPOKEN is underlined in the text.

238 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

and offers a real value for social relations, it* is not less true that French is the mother-tongue of a still more important part of this same population, and that for more than a century it has been the language used almost exclusively by the Administration for public affairs and for foreign relations.

Our protest cannot be stated too strongly, for the more the Flemings willingly learn French the earlier the *fransquillions* will be singing the requiem over Flanders.

Those town councillors forget (purposely?) that the municipality has to administer the communes and not the Brussel group, and that there are communes where the Flemings who speak one language only are far more numerous than the Walloons who speak one only—*e.g.* at Anderlecht and St Jan's Molenbeek.

These gentlemen forget (purposely?) that where the Flemings form the minority, that minority is so strong that their rights cannot be neglected by the administration. Or is it that this minority does not interest those gentlemen because it consists mainly of a working-class population? For us, democrats, Flamingsants, their interests are for that reason the more sacred.

What would these logicians answer if we

were to tell them, with quite as much (or quite as little) justice, that the province of Brabant is three-fourths Flemish, and consequently the administration language of all its communes, including those that are exclusively Walloon, ought to be Netherlandish ? The opposition would be merciless. Nevertheless our argument is just as good as theirs.

Those same town councillors produce a historical argument : “ *For more than a century it [French] has been the language used almost exclusively by the Administration for public affairs and for foreign relations.*”¹

Since when has a wrong become sacrosanct because it has existed for a century or more ? If that were true, then a slave population ought to die as slaves. The rights of the Poles have been trampled underfoot for a century ; consequently, the Poles have no more rights. It is the argument used by the Germans in annexing Courland and Livonia. It is high time the war stopped ! These gentlemen of the town council have already imbibed too much German kultur !

The main argument of the councillors is—“ *French is a business language.*” And therefore the Flemings have to be governed in French ! The Polish Jews transact their petty business

¹ *Informations Belges.*

240 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

deals in Yiddish or Hebrew. Consequently the Poles have to be administered in this language ?

No ! Those gentlemen are wrong ! Let them have no illusions. The Flemish question will not be solved in that way.

In Belgium there is a dual people, the majority of which live in the north and speak Netherlandish, and the minority in the south and speak French. Both must, and will, have their rights, and nothing less than their rights.

(2) *Is Flanders Bilingual ?*

Let us return to the Belgians who pretend to speak two or more languages. Statistics read as follows :—

Netherlandish and French	French and German	Netherlandish and German	Polyglots : Three Languages	Total
871,288	74,993	8652	52,547	1,007,480

Thirteen per cent. of the Belgian population, therefore, pretends to know two or more languages. Twelve per cent. pretends to know French and Netherlandish. From this we might conclude that neither Flanders nor Wallonia

is bilingual. For a people 10 per cent. only of which speaks two languages cannot be considered as bilingual.

The immense majority of bilinguals dwell in Flanders. The figures are 746,733 out of 871,288 bilinguals (French, Netherlandish)—say 85 per cent. The remaining 15 per cent. dwell, of course, in Wallonia. These so-called bilinguals in the Flemish country are distributed as follows :—

Province	Inhabitants	Bilinguals : French and Flemish	Per cent.
Oost Vlaanderen . . .	1,120,335	120,478	10
Limburg . . .	275,691	30,622	11
West Vlaanderen . . .	874,135	125,310	14
Antwerpen . . .	968,677	117,065	14
Brabant . . .	1,469,677	353,258	24
		746,733	

No unbiased person will conclude that Oost Vlaanderen, Limburg, West Vlaanderen, Antwerpen are bilingual provinces, as only 10 to 14 per cent. of the inhabitants pretend to know two languages. And he will certainly refrain from concluding that the state has to accommodate itself to the wishes of the 10 to 14 per cent.

242 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

Brabant requires further examination.

BRABANT

Arrondissement	Inhabitants	Bilingual	Per cent.
Nivelles . . .	170,815	6,871	4
Leuven . . .	254,412	36,273	14
Brussel . . .	982,074	338,853	34

In the most bilingual district of Belgium—Brussel—34 per cent. of the population declare that they speak two languages and 66 per cent. one.

One point of interest remains for investigation. Which language do bilinguals speak by preference? (See Table, p. 243.)

These figures prove clearly that the immense majority of Flemings who have learned some French are not prepared to disavow their natural language. Even there the bilingual people speak Flemish by choice. What a thunderbolt for the Brussel town councillors, and for that deputy for Brussel who, after the last Census, asked in Parliament when Brussel was going to be declared a Walloon city! He had simply counted as Walloons all the Flemings who know French.

Let us examine for a little the figures for a

FLEMISH PROVINCES AND BRABANT

Province	Fig.	Inhabitants	People speaking more than one Language, but speaking preferentially				
			Netherlandish (V.) Total	Per cent.	French (F.) Total	Per cent.	German (D.) Total
Antwerpen . .	35	968,677	112,107	12	21,124	2	6543
Brabant . .	36	1,469,677	226,530	15	182,399	12	7931
Limburg . .	37	275,691	3,370	1	27,641	10	270
Oost Vlaanderen .	38	1,120,335	106,319	9	16,107	1	494
West Vlaanderen .	39	874,135	105,330	12	22,059	3	405

244 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

few towns in order to prove how thoroughly Flemish they are.

In Antwerpen ¹ out of 301,766 inhabitants 22,701 prefer to speak French, or 7 per cent.

In Lier out of 25,869 inhabitants 364 prefer to speak French, or 1 per cent.

In Mechelen ² out of 59,142 inhabitants 2336 prefer to speak French, or 4 per cent.

In Herenthals out of 8995 inhabitants 43 prefer to speak French, or not 1 per cent.

In Turnhout out of 23,742 inhabitants 194 prefer to speak French, or 1 per cent.

Even in the Gent district (we have no separate statistical figures for this town), which is a well-known French centre under the supervision of the University, only 3173 people speak French exclusively, out of a population of 167,419 souls ; thus not even 2 per cent.

If in Belgium the Italian system were adopted, of citing not the persons but the families whose language is not that of the country, one would be astonished at the small number of French families in Flanders.

¹ Antwerpen is a garrison town, and numbers many Walloon metal workers and many Frenchmen born.

² This high figure is explained by the presence of the higher clergy, but especially by the numerous Walloons working in the railway arsenals. Furthermore, Mechelen is a garrison town.

[TABLE.]

TOWNS

Towns	Fig.	Inhabi- tants	Uni- linguals speaking Nether- landish (V.)	French speaking (F.)	Multi- linguals preferring Nether- landish (V.)	French (F.)	Speaking commonly			
							Nether- landish Total	Per cent.	French. Total	Per cent.
Antwerpen .	40	301,766	200,933	8011	56,277	14,690	257,210	85	22,701	7
Herenthals .	41	8,995	7,522	11	911	32	8,433	94	43	—
Lier .	42	25,869	21,173	110	3,029	254	24,202	94	364	1
Mechelen .	43	59,142	44,325	771	10,174	1,565	54,499	92	2,336	4
Turnhout .	44	23,742	20,111	44	2,296	150	22,407	94	194	1

246 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

Before coming to a conclusion, one more question: *Who speaks French in Flanders?*

(1) Those who were born in France. They number in Belgium 119,148 distributed as follows:—

26,475	in the province of	Brabant
17,381	„ „	West Vlaanderen
6,800	„ „	Oost Vlaanderen
4,832	„ „	Antwerpen
586	„ „	Limburg

(2) A few Walloon immigrants. In Antwerpen there are, *e.g.*, a comparatively large number of Walloon doctors of medicine. They are preferred to Flemings by the administration for all public posts, because they have studied at Brussel University, which the administration wants to support, to the detriment of the Flemish doctors, most of whom have studied at the Catholic University of Leuven, and therefore are passed over by the Liberal administration. Flemish doctors occupy the same rank as Jewish doctors in Russia; and as in Russia are not allowed to practise in civilian hospitals!

(3) Officials. Speaking French leads to advancement.

(4) Officers. Three-fourths of the officers are Walloons. Three-fourths of the soldiers are Flemings! ¹

¹ Cf. the position under the Dutch regime.

(5) "The Flemish tradition was not supported by the Germans in Belgium," says the learned Emile Waxweiler.¹ What is more, the spreading of French was being supported by the Germans.

In Antwerpen a theatre for "French propaganda" was built: the *Théâtre des Variétés*. Germans or their descendants found the money for the undertaking. The patrons of the theatre were Germans and their descendants. This will be most patent after the war. If the Germans do not return to Antwerpen, then no more will be heard of the theatre. The strange thing about that theatre is, that when it was running they found that the invested capital was unproductive! So they applied to the town exchequer. The authorities dared not refuse a subsidy notwithstanding the opposition of the Flemings.

In the Athenæum there exists a French and a Flemish division. In the Flemish (?) division two courses are given in Netherlandish. The children of the Germans follow the French division. It is more than time that these facts were brought to light, for abroad the *frans-quillions* have managed successfully to give a contrary view: "Pan-Germanists intriguing at Antwerpen. They encourage the Flemish

¹ *La Belgique Neutre et Loyale*. Payot. Paris. 1915.

Movement!" In Antwerpen the Germans belonged to the *fransquillions*!

(6) A few business men and personages of high finance.

(7) Barristers without briefs, specialising in the launching of financial companies. Round them a little cosmopolitan clique.

(8) The daughter of the grocer, home from the *pensionnat*, who feels ashamed of her parents, and only finds Flemish good enough for the maid-servant.

(9) A few old, very respectable families, whose parents thought it advantageous to accept the language of the victor.

This list seems long. The total amount is small. The healthy working people of Flanders is Flemish to the core and speaks Netherlandish.

Is Flanders bilingual? No.

(8) *Is Wallonia Bilingual?*

After what has been said, to put the question is to answer it. For if Flanders has only one language, then, *a priori*, Wallonia has only one. The few thousand Flemings who remain such are not numerous enough to weaken this general conclusion.

Conclusion

Belgium is inhabited by Walloons who speak French and by Flemings who speak Nether-

landish. The former live below the language frontier, the latter above it.

The language frontier remains nearly unaltered, with the one exception of Brussel, which is inhabited by a very mixed population. Otherwise the frontier remains so sharply delineated that in a few villages French is spoken on one side of the street and Netherlandish on the other.

Professor Van der Essen is right when he says that all through the centuries the language frontier has remained almost unaltered.¹

¹ Professor Van der Essen. *A Short History of Belgium.*

CHAPTER IX

WILL FLANDERS BECOME BILINGUAL ?

“ Time is on our side.”

WE answer positively no. The reasons for this answer are so plausible that they seem to admit of no doubt whatever.

1st Reason. Evidence was taken repeatedly and systematically during eighty-five years with this result : Flanders remains Flemish. Moreover, the proportion of bilinguals declined. This comes as a surprise, especially to those who believed in a possible predominance of French. Nevertheless we shall prove its mathematical accuracy. The official figures are :

	Speaking French only	Speaking Netherlandish only
1880	2,230,316	2,485,384
1890	2,485,072	2,744,271
1900	2,574,805	2,822,005
1910	2,833,334	3,220,662

These figures require some explanation. In the censuses of 1880, 1900 and 1910 children below two years of age are reckoned as speaking the language of the family. From those figures it follows that the number of people speaking

one language, and especially of Flemings speaking one language, is on the increase.

Let us now examine the percentage of the people who speak one language only, according to the quarterly bulletin published by the Ministry of the Interior.¹

Percentage of people speaking one language :

	1900	1910
French alone . . .	38·47 per cent.	38·47 per cent.
Netherlandish alone . .	42·17 „	43·38 „

The percentage of those speaking French exclusively remained unaltered, the percentage of those speaking Netherlandish exclusively increased. In fact, the percentage of those two languages does not amount to 11 per cent. Were we able to add the children below two (and their number is greater among the Flemings), together with the number of those who are unable to speak the two languages, but who out of vanity declare they can, the figures would be still more eloquent.

The foundation of a Belgian state with one language was a crime against nature, an attempt to stop the course of the stars.

2nd Reason. The percentage of those who speak one language only must increase, for the very simple reason that births are more numerous in Flanders.

¹ Fourth year, No. 15.

252 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

The Belgian population from 1890 to 1900 increased yearly by an average of 62,449 ; from 1900 to 1910 by 72,023 ; and from 1910 to 1920 by 37,809.

Now the Fleming increases more quickly than the Walloon. During the years 1900 to 1913 the population of the province of Antwerpen increased by 18·25 per cent. Then comes Brabant with 16·81 per cent. The population of those two provinces represents 32 per cent. only of the nation, and yet the increase of those two provinces is one half that of the whole of Belgium. This is specially a consequence of immigration from the Flemish villages, where births are very numerous. That is why Brussel will never become French.

Births are per thousand at the rate of—
Limburg, 31·35 ; West Vlaanderen, 27·85 ;
Antwerpen, 27·05 ; Oost Vlaanderen, 25·18 ;
Luxemburg, 22·37 ; Brabant, 20·45 ; Namur,
19·33 ; Hainaut, 18·37 ; Liège, 17·30.

Mr S. Rowntree made inquiries in 267 Flemish and 161 Walloon districts, in towns and in villages. One thousand mothers (1899-1901) had in the Flemish country 267 children, in the Walloon 161 children.

The highest figures are in the Flemish country at Hamme, 268 ; Temsche, 263 ; Roeselare, 255.

WILL FLANDERS BE BILINGUAL ? 253

'The lowest in Wallonia, Ougrée, 163 ; Jemeppes, 154 ; Chatelineau, 153.

This proves that in the Walloon country the birth-rate exceeds the death-rate by very little, whilst that of the Flemish country is sensibly higher.

The average death-rate in Belgium is 16·88 per thousand.

Conclusion

At present there are 2,941,417 Walloons to more than 4,369,315 Flemings. The Walloon population does not increase, the Flemish does. In the face of this fact the French language is powerless. "France," said von Moltke, "loses a battle every day because of its birth-rate." Germany is losing a battle every day to the Poles. The Polish population increases by 20 per thousand, the German by 15 per thousand. Therefore the Poles are able to resist Germanisation. The French in Canada daily gain a battle over the English. Wallonia loses every day a battle to Flanders. "Victorious fecundity," said Zola, "remains the unquestioned power, the dominant factor which by itself shapes the future. All through history, not a single step forward was made, except when numbers pushed humanity on its march."

Why, then, is the birth-rate so much higher in Flanders than in Wallonia ?

254 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

French scholars have discussed the question in all their academies, and all sorts of reasons have been advanced. Reading through the reports, one asks oneself whether all those learned men became voluntarily blind. They sought where the solution could not be found. And then they came to various ridiculous conclusions ; proposing, *e.g.*, to give two pounds to every woman giving birth to a child, just as if a woman would accept all the dangers of pregnancy, etc., for the sake of a piece of money !

In London we heard from the mouth of an English Roman Catholic bishop that in his diocese one-fifth only of the population was Catholic. But that fifth was responsible for one-third of the children. There lies the solution.

Our Flemish people is Catholic. There lies Flemish salvation. There lies the Flemish future. We feel the lesson to our very fingertips, no matter where we turn during this war.

One danger there is for the Flemings : the death-rate amongst children is higher in Flanders than in Wallonia !

But after religion there is perhaps a second reason. The Flemish folk is an agricultural race, and the wife of the peasant is the healthy procreative energy of our nation.

* English statesmen have neglected agriculture. We criticised the German chancellor, Von Bülow, for his anti-Polish policy : his agricultural policy deserves our attention. His predecessor was on the way to make Germany, after the example of England, into an industrial state ; Von Bülow stopped that tendency. He personally took command of the government and pursued a sound agricultural policy.¹ History has proved that his view was sound.

The much-regretted Belgian minister of state, M. Schollaert, was no Flamingant. By his clear-sighted agricultural policy, however, he showed the Flemish Movement the way to its future. If the Flemings follow his policy, Flanders will arise !

3rd Reason. The third reason why Flanders will never become bilingual lies in the fact that the Flemings keep watch over Flanders. The Flemings hate becoming *Brussel half-breeds*, concerning whom M. Destrée wrote to the King :

“ A second species of Belgian has grown up in the country, especially in Brussel, a type that has little to commend it. It seems to have kept the defects of the two races, whilst losing their qualities.”

Flanders is at one with its esteemed leader, Mr Frans van Cauwelaert, M.P., when he says :

¹ Prince von Bülow. *Imperial Germany*. Cassell. London.

256 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

“ Nature followed its course when it proved in our country, as everywhere else, that mules are sterile. The Flemings feel that they, like the Walloons, can only reach their normal development in the pure atmosphere of their own unmixed culture ; and they stand firmly resolved to regain their complete cultural unity and autonomy at all costs.” ¹

Certain lessons enrich and adorn the mind. We accept them thankfully, and we will profit by them. But certain lessons concern our very nature and change the course of our life ; those we do not accept. We can borrow foreign science, but we cannot borrow foreign temperament. We will partake of what we are able to digest and assimilate and reshape in our own blood ; but not what is incongruous with our nature.

¹ *Vrij Belgie*, 19th October 1917.

CHAPTER X

TOWARDS THE SOLUTION

"We have implored the peoples, in the name of God, who is Himself the infinite love, to renounce the aim to destroy each other, and to proclaim clearly once for all the aims and aspirations of each nation, taking well into account, as much as it is just and practicable, the different national aspirations."

BENEDICT XV.

"An evident principle appears through the programme I have outlined. It is the principle of justice for all peoples and nationalities."—PRESIDENT WILSON (*Le Temps*, 11th January 1918).

FLANDERS finds itself at a turning-point of its history. A few Flemings, driven by despair and moved by opportunism, have sought German support. How could they not see that German influence in Flanders is a remedy that does not cure, but kill !

It is so evident ! An autonomous Flanders, politically independent of Wallonia, would be far too small to live in economic independence, and would therefore necessarily be dependent on Germany. But a Flanders economically dependent on Germany would, in a short time, be absorbed politically. Does not every page of history during the last century teach us that economic influence always preceded the political flag ?

258 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

After political and economic dependence, cultural dependence would soon follow. This also is the natural trend of events. But this would come about much more quickly in Flanders than elsewhere. If Flanders has resisted French influences, then it is because the Netherlandish language differs too much from the French. The Flemings have never succeeded in overcoming the difficulties of the French tongue; but they do not find the same trouble with English or with German. Economically dependent on Germany, Antwerpen, the largest commercial town of Flanders, would become German in a very short time.

That is why it is so consoling to see that the Flemings have not followed the Activists, who sought support in Germany.

The behaviour of these Activists is, therefore, not even sound *real-politik*; it must be put down to embitterment. This is certainly so in the case of most Activists. We refer particularly to those amongst them who organised the Flemish University; these are most respectable persons. But after them come men who, before the war, never took any active share in the Flemish Movement. We speak of the first only. The reasons for their bitterness were so endless that really superhuman self-possession was

required from them not to succumb to the temptation to put themselves under the German government. After centuries of struggling for individuality the ripening apple was offered at the very moment when nothing had been left undone by those in authority to sour and embitter the Flemings.

It is true that our king, with a clearer insight than that possessed by those about him, spoke this pregnant word to the Flemings: "Flemings, remember the Battle of the Golden Spurs; Walloons, remember the people of Franchimont," and thus recognised the duality of our people.

If the Government had added a single word, and following the lead of the loftiest statesmen of the world declared that, the war being waged for the liberty of the peoples in order to develop their civilisation, the Flemish people could reckon on the Government for the restitution of its rights and honour, one would probably never have heard of Activism. Not only did the Flemish people not hear this word, but from the Government-subsidised Press a cry went up: "*Now the Flemish Movement is finished. Belgium will be Latin, or nothing.*"

When our own army fell in Antwerpen it seemed to be a foreign occupation. Where the

260 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

local administration was formerly Netherlandish, nearly everything was now being done in French. The Flemish people swallowed its sufferings.

When our army had left Belgium things grew worse. The Flemings who, at the peril of their lives, had fled by hundreds from Belgium, were received in Folkestone by French officers who did not know a word of Netherlandish. If wounded were entertained the speeches were in French alone. At interments only French funeral orations were heard. Flemish soldiers put their savings together in order to buy a wreath with a Flemish inscription to be placed on the grave of one of their comrades. Their commanding officer returned the money, saying that he could not stand a Flemish inscription on a wreath. If they were brought before a court martial they did not understand their judges and these did not understand them.¹ Our last liberty, the "Habeas Corpus," was not even respected.

The Flemish people was treated like a conquered race.

¹ We are glad to be able to add that the Belgian authorities published in the official journal of 29th September 1918 a decree-law aiming at the institution of Flemish military tribunals for Flemish soldiers. The publication of this decree-law, after four years of war, is a noble and generous official admission that our soldiers have been deprived for four years of the most sacred civil right of self-defence in a language they could understand.

Nevertheless, the Flemish people did not follow the Activists! Out of servility? Certainly not!

But they refuse to remain in a subordinate condition. They accept the struggle for a free Flanders in a free Belgium. The project is ripe for execution.¹ The hour is supreme. On a final, thorough and just solution of the language problem depends the existence of Belgium. The bells are ringing from the steeple. Let us go to church, not because they are ringing, but because it is time.

In the preceding pages we have established the basis of a sound solution as it is indicated by nature. Flanders is Flemish; the Walloon country is French; the Brussel group has a character of its own.

The Flemish people must remain Flemish in their being and their language; it can never be otherwise.

The Walloons shall remain French. The more Walloon a Walloon, the more Flemish a Fleming—the more truly beautiful and national our country. No half measures, said Gladstone in 1885, speaking about Ireland, but drastic measures, extirpating root and branch all previous misunderstanding and mismanagement.

¹F. Van Cauwelaert, M.P. Cf. *Vrij Belgie*.

262 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

Does that mean that we would exclude French from Flanders, Flemish from the Walloon country? We are not Turks, or Magyars, or Prussians, or *Rogier*. We, first of all, want to be ourselves; Flemish, as Englishmen are English, as Frenchmen are French. We wish, moreover, to learn French in order to be one nation with our Walloon brethren and to enjoy all that is good and beautiful in French—but only in so far as the study of a second language becomes no hindrance to the development of our people and our own personality. We will learn French willingly, voluntarily and not at the word of command of a Walloon or French speaking sergeant.

We want to solve the Flemish question with a view to the best interests of the whole country, avoiding friction as much as possible, asking from the Walloons as little as possible and hoping accordingly that they will not expect more from us.

It follows that Flemish would be imposed on those who, as paid officials, would come into contact with the Flemish people.

Such is the practice in South Africa. In other questions we will be on our guard not to interfere with the language problems of the Walloons. We expect as much from them.

It is the duty of the leaders of both to set love for their own people in harmony with love for the common country.

We desire just as little to encroach on the liberty of those Flemings who would alter their natures in order to appear French.

That concerns themselves. But another question is, would the state derive any advantage from encouraging such action? That is to say, is it to the advantage of the commonwealth that there should be in the Flemish part of Belgium a rich caste speaking a language different from that of the people? Absolutely not. It is an unsound position, a dangerous position. It is mediæval, anti-democratic, anti-Christian. Where is the statesman or the thinker to contradict us?

Mutual dependence must exist between all ranks of society if God's purpose is to be fulfilled.¹ If this caste does not understand the position, it is a matter for them alone. But one day they might feel it to their disadvantage. In fact, the state has no right to encourage them by using our money to introduce French schools.

We speak of French schools where mules are being bred, not of French schools where one learns French. There is an immense difference

¹ Cardinal Bourne. *The Nation's Crisis*. Cath. Soc. Guild.

between those two. In England the school where one learns French is English, as in France the school where one learns English is French.

It is even as little the business of the state to found French tribunals and a French administration for this caste. It would be a fine state of things if we were to have French justice and a French army for the rich only, and Flemish schools, Flemish administration, Flemish justice for the mass of the poor. It would be an overt act against social justice.

Where a difference of language exists between the educated and the uneducated classes, no community, no solidarity exists. We may call it a blessing for our country that the French- and Netherlandish-speaking populations are separated by a linguistic frontier. It eases the language question considerably.

Let us suppose for a moment that the educated classes all over *Belgium* speak French, and that the people speak Netherlandish. On the one side the rich, on the other side the people doomed to ignorance and slavery. Is not the social gulf wide enough already without the aggravation of a difference in languages? This position would be worse than in Macedonia, where the mingling of races is so great that peace is impossible. We say worse because

in Belgium separation into castes would be superadded.

These conditions, however, do exist in Flanders, and the state and higher clergy have encouraged them too long. We have another ideal of the social mission of Church and state : we believe that their true mission lies in causing peoples to fraternise and not in sowing or perpetuating division between them.

Another supposition is still possible—viz. that Walloons and Flemings should live side by side in little groups all over the country. To how many quarrels would such a situation not lead ? Let us remember France and her Huguenots, who were segregated in small, fortified groups.

The foundation of a state in the state is always the beginning of a merciless struggle.

In Belgium, Nature has settled things better than that. Let us listen to her voice. The failure of the Powers who tried to settle things and enforce peace contrary to the natures of the peoples is sufficiently shown by the consequences that followed the unhappy arrangements of the peace conferences of 1815 and 1878.

We have no illusions. The reactionaries of all parties and classes, clerical and temporal, will unite with all these little would-be Metternichs, at the cry of unity, anti-Germanism, in

order to crush our Flemish consciousness and deny our rights.

After the declaration of statesmen that this war is being waged so that each people may be free to develop according to its peculiar nature and capacities; after the sacrifice of Flemish blood on the Belgian altar; after all the declarations — however ambiguous — of the Belgian administration, we may rest assured that an end has come to the overt and brutal French power in Flanders. Even those who yesterday shouted “Never!” to the excited Flemings asking for their rights would not dare to-day to pronounce an open “*Non possumus!*”

The Flemings may feel happy over this first moral victory. That is why they accept with love all the trials the war has brought them and will bring them to-morrow. We repeat: the war has given the final blow to open oppression and systematic frenchifying. A new era awaits the Flemings.

Will it be a time of real victory when the resuscitated Flemish people will be permitted to grow in the directions inspired by its individuality?

From official declarations concerning the Flemish question made during the war it is abundantly clear to anyone who can pluck meaning from the tangle of diplomatic phrases

that those in authority mean to deal with the matter after the war as before—that is, from the fallacious standpoint of an imaginary historic bilinguality.

Everything points to the fact that an anti-Flemish *bloc* is in course of formation : higher clergy, nobility and high finance. His Eminence, Cardinal Mercier, who has ever been an outpost of France, sets the Flemish question in a religious light.

“ But when there is a question of erecting a *neutral* Flemish university at Gent, or the splitting up of the lectures at the University of Leuven, or the *erection* of a second university, the religious, social, scientific and economic principles involved are much more complicated and it is much more difficult to bring about harmony. The questions raised can only be solved after thorough investigation and the concerted attention of all competent and responsible authorities. To demand from us an isolated binding declaration would involve a step beyond our rights. We cannot give an answer. Give your bishops your loyal support until such time as they can take concerted action, and be sure that they, in turn, will act with the same honesty to all that *the interests of the Flemish people, the Fatherland and the Church require from them.*

268 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

“It is in this mutual understanding that real union, which up till now has been our strength and our joy, must be assured and kept up.”¹

I emphasise the words “neutral,” “erection,” and “the interests of the Flemish people, the Fatherland and the Church.”

We know the interests of the Flemish people, as they are conceived. These interests are, first, that the Flemish people should learn French; secondly, that the Flemish people should speak French; and thirdly, that the Flemish people should forget Flemish. We know the interests of the Fatherland: unity of language! Get yourself turned into a Frenchman. Flemings, the interest of the Fatherland requires it!

The interest of the Church? “*The foundation of a neutral Flemish university.*” This little word “neutral” speaks volumes. His Eminence knows very well that there is no question of such a foundation. We Flemings ask that an existing French University of Gent should be made Flemish!

The second member of the anti-Flemish *bloc* is Minister de Broqueville, with his motto: “Flanders for ever bilingual.”²

¹ Cardinal Mercier. *Letter to the Clergy*. Septuagesima, 1918.

² Speech in Paris. *Bulletin de l'Association Générale Belge*, 30th November 1917.

The third factor in the *bloc* is high finance. It is asserted that the Flemings have in Belgium everything they wished for, and there never was any question of oppression. And with this *bloc* the Liberal Conservatives, Militarists, Social Imperialists, etc., will throw in their lot.

Notwithstanding all that, our hopes turn to :

(1) Parliament—we have already given our opinion concerning it.

(2) Good intentions—and we all know how prettily hell is paved with them.

(3) A change in our electoral system—when a majority will surely be found to abrogate the list vote.

(4) Our statesmen.

Conditions now are such that the least clear-sighted among our politicians must recognise that the solution of the Flemish question is of vital importance. Half measures would only tend to exasperate and excite the resistance of the Flemings, and no one could foresee what that might lead to.

What is the duty of a statesman? “It is to effect by pacific and constitutional means all that a revolution would accomplish by violent means.”¹ Things will not go so far as that in Belgium, for revolution is difficult, if not impossible, in peace-time.

¹ Lord Beaconsfield. Birmingham, 7th June 1881.

270 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

The state, for reasons of self-preservation, has every interest in seeing that the citizens are conscious of the fact that their private interests are merged in those of the state, and are consequently guaranteed. This consciousness is a solid basis of patriotism. If this consciousness exists, then the state can always count on the services of the citizens.

But the state is not an end in itself, outside and above the people, with might as the means of governing. The state has a mission. This mission is the reason of its existence. Its means of government is love, with might as a means of protection. Thus the state is a guiding power. But few thinking people are partisans of the *laissez faire* theory in the economic field, as it means, in fact, *laissez opprimer*. Still fewer thinking people are partisans of the *laissez faire* theory in the cultural field. The state became educator: it is, therefore, something more than a mere protector of "money-making animals."

There is none who will pretend that difference of language between a rich and educated caste and the people can exercise a pacifying influence. No one will hold that a people whose language is not recognised by the guiding or ruling class will feel for its governors that love which is engendered by a common language and by common interests. No one will hold that it is

in agreement with our present democratic conception of the state that the state, by education, justice, administration, should estrange the ruling class from the people by the use of a language foreign to the people. Not to separate but to draw closer the bonds between the social classes is the mission of the state.

But especially in Belgium statesmen must take care to prevent the language struggle from degenerating into race rivalry, leading to the ultimate destruction of Belgium's internal and external foreign policy.

The task will not be easy. Belgian statesmen have to learn that the state can and must accommodate itself to the duality of our people. Switzerland proved this possibility. Nevertheless there are writers who doubt it. "Unless Flanders becomes united to Holland or Germany it is more than probable that the French tongue will ultimately predominate there also."¹

The Flemish language question is a national, domestic, Belgian question of theoretical, international importance; being an example of the greater problems which bulk largely in the foreground of international affairs—viz. the question whether a state can accommodate itself to a people consisting of two parts, each

¹ L. Dominian. *Frontiers of Language and Nationality*, p. xxiv. Constable. London. 1918.

272 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

speaking its own language. We are optimistic about this matter ; and we trust that Belgium will be led by statesmen capable of solving this problem. May our fervent desires blossom in new life !

“The energies of submerged nationalities have hitherto been absorbed by the struggle for survival. Relief from this stress will be accompanied by respect for alien rights instead of hatred of the oppressor.”¹

Our struggle is the highest expression of a striving towards self-preservation. It is by no means directed against the Walloons or against France. It is not a negative struggle. We only desire to be allowed, as a people, to contribute to the splendour of humanity, which owes so much to the free development of the nationalities. We especially wish to be allowed to contribute our share to Belgium's greatness. It will not be long before there shall be written of Belgium what Justin McCarthy wrote of England :

“The principle of nationality changed reluctant and struggling people into willing and prosperous partners in the British state.”²

(5) The war opened the eyes of so many

¹ L. Dominian. *Frontiers of Language and Nationality*. Constable, London. 1918.

² Justin McCarthy. *A Short History of Our Own Times*. Chatto & Windus, London.

people. The struggle for autonomous culture is now the *credo* of mankind. The Walloons must understand that it is not they, but we, who have to decide our destinies. How can they refuse to us what they ask for other small nationalities ?

“The right of self-determination,” writes Count Goblet d’Alviella, “would bring about the disappearance of a cause of unrest which, if left to propagate, will endanger in future every form of peace.”

(6) We trust in our Flemish people, in its waking consciousness. In spite of our religious and temporal authorities we build on the waking consciousness of our Flemish folk. The authorities live apart from this Flemish people. They think they know it, because it has remained respectful to their authority and does not throw stones at their heads. But respectfully we say to them : “You do not know the growing power of Flanders. Do you realise what is going on in the soul of the people ?” Did Tsarism ever realise what was brooding in Russia ? Did William II. guess the approach of the year 1880 ? An ostrich policy cost England her American colonies. Authority is so credulous because it is so human. It accepts willingly as true what it wishes to be true.

And you Belgian authorities, you have grown

274 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

up quite apart from the new Flemish generation. There is no shadow of disrespect in our voice when we say this ; we understand your position — you breathe another atmosphere. Many amongst you belong to what one calls the “upper classes” ; others were born in the shadow of a castle ; still others were the spoiled children of aristocratic, or would-be aristocratic, teachers.

And just outside your little circle a people has grown up. Flanders, forsaken for so long, but regenerated by solitude, stands up and demands autonomous life, confident in its own strength. Like the grain of wheat in the earth it has germinated, and now thrusts through the dark crust that imprisoned it. It grows, it grows, and will soon be ripe. And you, authority, you do not know—or you will not know. Do you know such names as given by Dr Persijn : Beelen, A. Van Hoonacker, Max Rooses, W. De Vreese, P. Fredericq, J. MacLeod, J. Vercouillie, H. Logeman, J. Obrie, P. Bellefroid, J. Bols, J. Muyldermans, F. Drijvers, E. Vliebergh, L. Scharpé, E. Lauwers, Fr. and E. Bauwens, C. Lecoutere, E. Gaillard, K. De Flou, A. De Cock, Is Teirlinck, M. Jossion, L. De Wolf, J. Mansion, P. Buschman, D. Van den Velde, F. Mceus, V. Fris, J. Hoste, etc., etc.

Do you know : De Bo, Gezelle, Verriest,

Rodenbach, De Laey, Verschaeve, Dosfel, Streuvels, Sabbe, De Bom, Van de Woestyne, J. De Cock, Teirlinck, etc. ? ¹

Before the war you knew the names of a few amongst the new generation. You knew, for example, that Gezelle was punished because this glorious and gifted poet dared to sing in his mother-tongue. I know English literary people who know more of Gezelle than you. You learned of others during the war and, naturally, you have a bad opinion of them, just as they have of you. But these men are effecting an upheaval in Flanders, and developing its special culture. You do not know them, or you suppose them vulgar, judging from the insults thrown at them by your paid Press. But the spirits of these men of Flanders are high. They pay contempt with contempt; they love this hatred; and their soul expands under the powerful impulse of their love for the Flemish folk. The fire of this love is spreading and kindling life all through the glory that is Flanders.

Do they know, those in authority (or do they not?), of the 1200 Flemish doctors, barristers, engineers, philologists who, seven years ago, met in Antwerpen to take stock of

¹ Dr J. Persijn. *A Glance at the Soul of the Low Countries*, passim. Washbourne. London.

276 LANGUAGE QUESTION IN BELGIUM

their common Flemish science, when honourable ministers, to their immense regret, were unable to attend the sittings ?

Do they know, those in authority, of the 800 Catholic university students scattered over Flanders, but strongly leagued for the vindication of Flemish right ?

They did not notice them. One cannot be angry with them on this account.

Do they know, those in authority, of the splendid movement led by Dr Laporta amongst the students of the secondary and higher schools ? The temporal authorities have, of course, no time to waste over students. This question does not concern them. But the spiritual authorities ? They knew of them, surely ! And you, pedagogues and learned psychologists, how intense your regrets must be ! You realise the immense blessing bestowed by your predecessors on this Flemish Movement when they destroyed the future for those youths who were going to be priests—when they turned ignominiously into the street as common criminals those students whose only crime was to have loved their mother-tongue ! Was not Christian hatred pushed so far as to enjoin all religious authorities in Belgium to refuse those black sheep an entrance to their colleges ?

Well, those outcast boys are men to-day.

Their love for Flanders was purified and steeled in the fire of scorn. Those men of Flanders, we know them. And that is why we believe in the future of Flanders. May we add that those Flemings are in a stern mood? The Flemish Movement is sometimes romantic—as when commemorating the Battle of the Golden Spurs—and this leaves you cold. But we know their meetings, their councils; there deep conviction speaks, and such seriousness reigns there as would not be amiss among our members of Parliament.

Certainly the Flemings are not yet the whole of Flanders. There are still the elder folks. But when they are no longer living, on comes the new generation. It sounds so commonplace. Let it not be taken in bad part; every day they grow older, and with age conservatism becomes stronger and stronger. That is why the older generation is inclined to imagine, very unwisely, that the world must be as their fancy pictures it. Flanders of yore rises again in the youth of to-day. There are still Flemings not yet wide-awake. Never a people was led by all its officially appointed governors to great deeds. No people ever led itself. But “One man with convictions is worth ten with interest only,” says Stuart Mill. Men of strong convictions are to be found among us by the

thousand, men of the faith that moves mountains. They are ready for conscience sake to follow the banished Flemings to the Island of Cézambre, or the French prisons. They are warming the chilled heart of our Flemish people till their blood seethes !

And the leaders of these Flemings will have the more influence because the Flemish Movement, democratic in its origin, its existence and its being, has been born at a time when democracy is striding victoriously forward.

“ What stamps, as it were, with a peculiar imprint the many-sided impressions and aspirations of the Flemish Movement is this : every deed, every action, proves the powerful impulse of the people’s mind towards the building by common effort—educated going hand in hand with peasant and worker—of an autonomous culture, which will permeate all the strata of the people and will lift their individuality to a higher plane.”¹

We trust in our soldiers. Thousands fell for a free Flanders in a free Belgium. Their souls live in our midst ; they keep guard over us. Those who stood on the Yser, those iron men, will see to it that their blood shall not have been shed in vain. For it is their blood that shall cement the new Belgium. Without that

¹ H. Borginon. *Ons Vaderland*, 30th November 1917.

cement the building falls in ruins ; with that cement it will be permanent, to the glory of Flanders and Belgium.

Our king gave proof of a true sense of justice and clear insight when he recognised the duality of our people in his proclamation to the army at the beginning of the war :

“ Flemings, remember the Battle of the Golden Spurs !

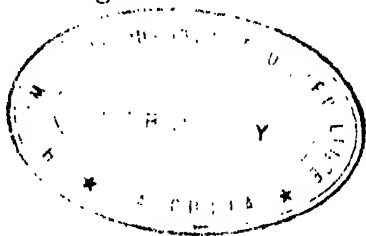
“ Walloons, remember the men of Franchimont ! ”

To which we answer :

God save the King !

God save Flanders !

God save Belgium !



DIAGRAMS

ILLITERATES

(a) *General*

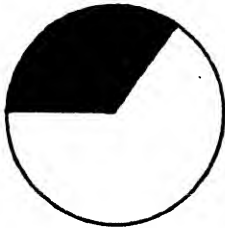


Fig. 1.—Flemish Districts

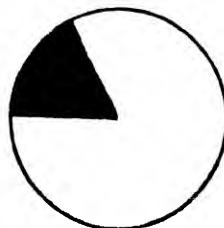


Fig. 2.—Walloon Districts

(*Cf.* p. 204)

(b) *Recruits*



Fig. 3

V = Flemings
4th class

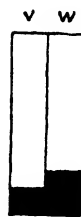


Fig. 4

W = Walloons
5th class

(*Cf.* p. 206)

BIRTHS

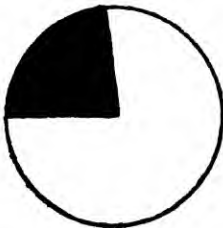


Fig. 5.—In Flanders

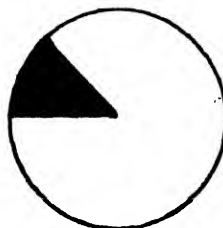


Fig. 6.—In Wallonia

(*Cf.* p. 210)

LANGUAGES SPOKEN IN BELGIUM
D=German; *FD*=French and German; *V*=Flemish; *F*=French;
T=Three Languages; *VF*=Flemish and French; *VD*=French and German

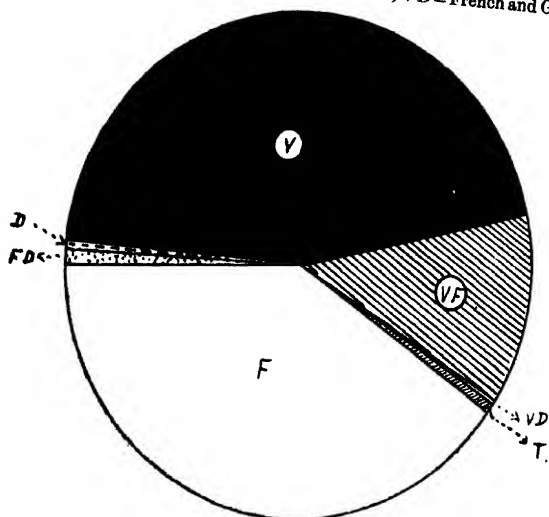


Fig. 7.—(Cf. p. 221)

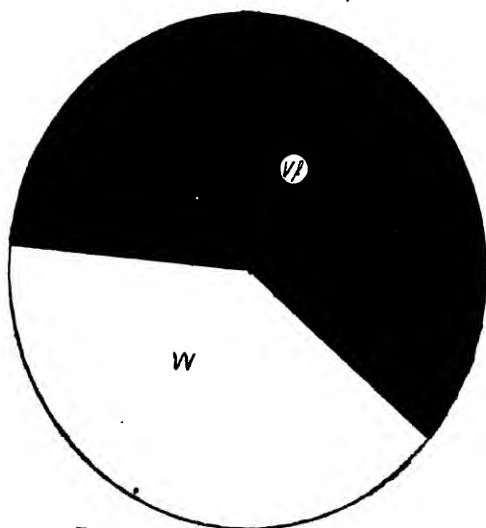


Fig. 8.—*V*=Flemings; *W*=Walloons

THE FLEMISH PROVINCES

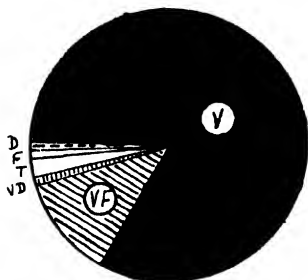


Fig. 9.—Antwerpen



Fig. 10.—Limburg

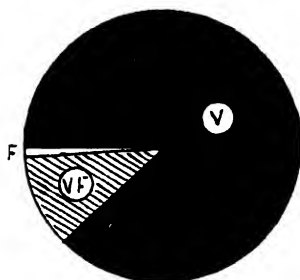


Fig. 11.—Oost Vlaanderen

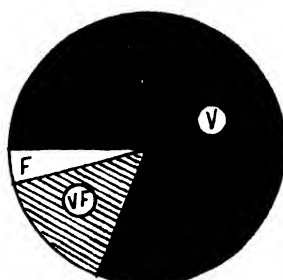


Fig. 12.—West Vlaanderen
(Cf. p. 227)

WALLOON PROVINCES

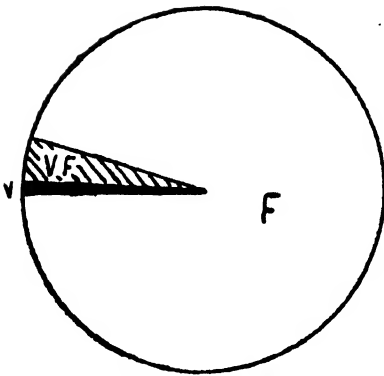


Fig. 13.—Hainaut

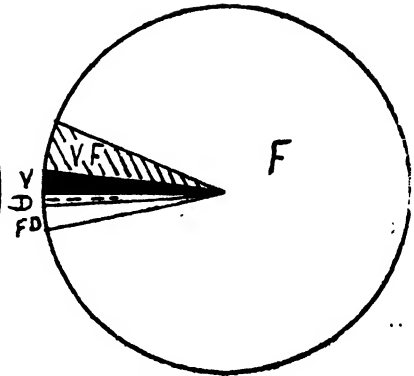


Fig. 14.—Liège

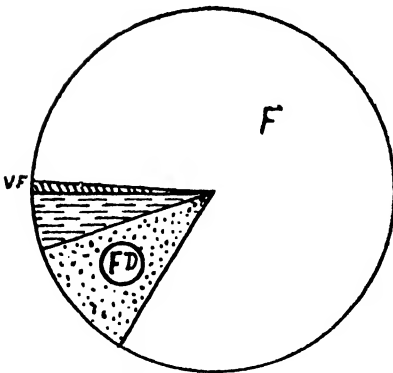


Fig. 15.—Luxemburg

(Cf. Table, p. 230)

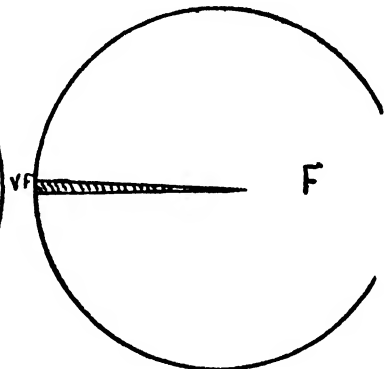


Fig. 16.—Namur

PROVINCE OF BRABANT

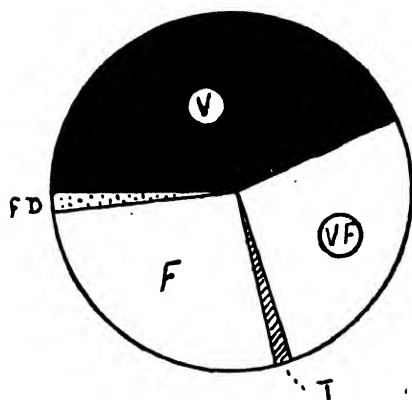


Fig. 17.—The Province

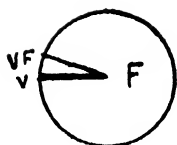


Fig. 18.—Nivelles



Fig. 19.—Leuven

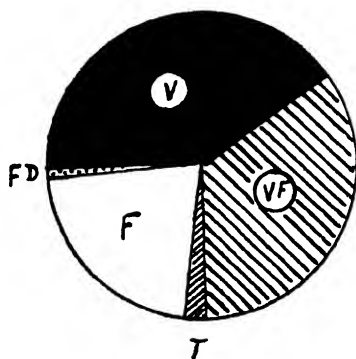


Fig. 20.—Brussel
(Cf. Table, p. 231)

BRUSSEL AND SUBURBS

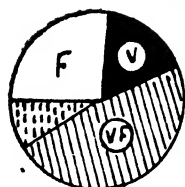


Fig. 21.—Brussel



Fig. 22.—Anderlecht

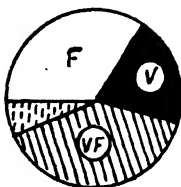


Fig. 23.—Etterbeek

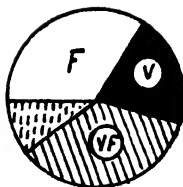


Fig. 24.—Elsene

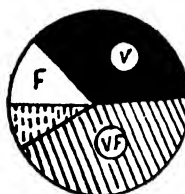


Fig. 25.—Laeken

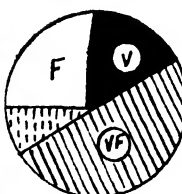


Fig. 26.—Schaerbeek

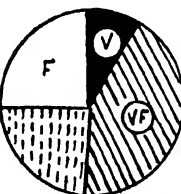


Fig. 27.—St. Gillis

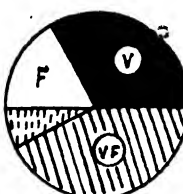


Fig. 28.—S. J. Molenbeek

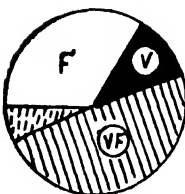


Fig. 29.—S. Joosten Noodle

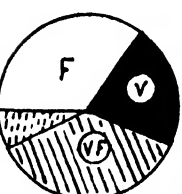


Fig. 30.—Vorst

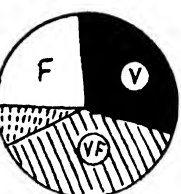


Fig. 31.—Watermael-Boschvoorde

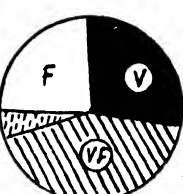


Fig. 32.—Comines

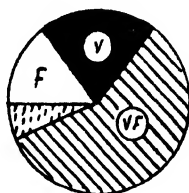


Fig. 33.—Enghien

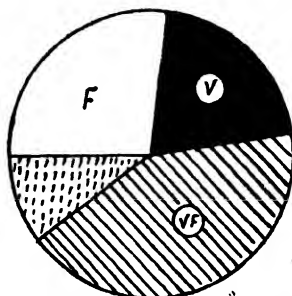


Fig. 34.—Brussel and Suburbs

THE FLEMISH PROVINCES AND BRABANT

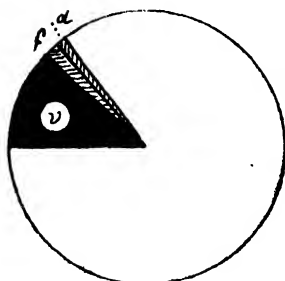


Fig. 35.—Antwerpen

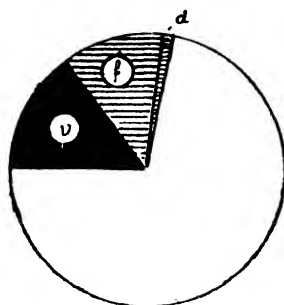


Fig. 36.—Brabant

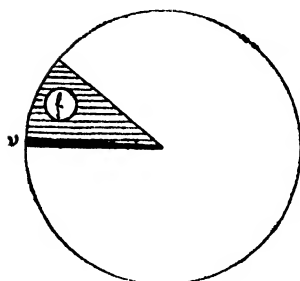


Fig. 37.—Limburg

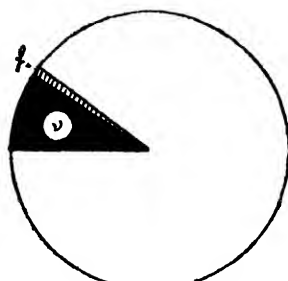


Fig. 38.—Oost Vlaanderen

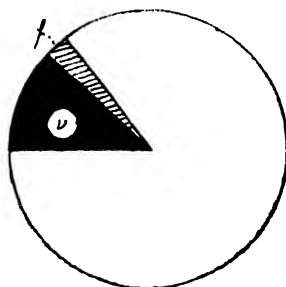


Fig. 39.—West Vlaanderen
(Cf. Table, p. 243)

A FEW FLEMISH TOWNS



Fig. 40.—Antwerpen

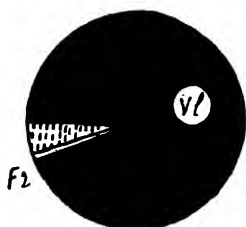


Fig. 41.—Herenthals

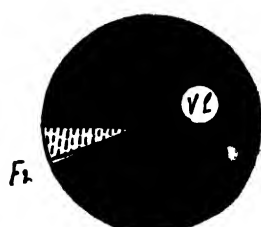


Fig. 42.—Lier



Fig. 43.—Mechelen

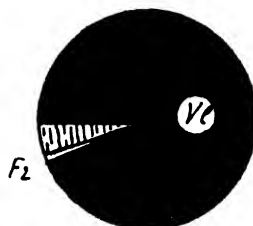
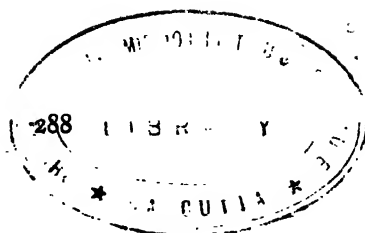
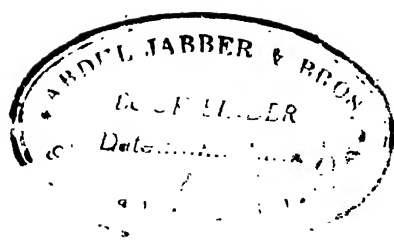


Fig. 44.—Turnhout

(Cf. Table, p. 245)





409.493/PER



7199

